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THE RED RAG.

A Novel.

BY
R. MOUNTENEY JEPHSON,

AUTHOR OF
"TOM BULLKELEY OF LISSINGTON,"
"HE WOULD BE A SOLDIER," "A PINK WEDDING," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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THE RED RAG.




PART I.

*RETURN OF THE QUEEN'S OWN FUSILIERS
FROM THE CRIMEA.*



CHAPTER I.

PEACE AT ANY PRICE.

“ON'T talk nonsense, Georgina !
I maintain that Puddleton
is making itself utterly contemptible.”

Thus spake with considerable, though I am sorry to add not unusual asperity, Mr. Joshua Buddlecombe, the worshipful mayor of Puddleton.

Of course the reader has heard of Puddleton. And yet I am not so sure of that. It is proverbial—and what is proverbial

must be founded on fact—that the world knows least of its greatest men, and the world's knowledge may, in like manner, be limited with regard to its greatest towns.

But the reader *should* have heard of Puddleton. There is no excuse for his or her ignorance; for just let me tell him or her that he or she would cut a pretty figure without the articles which have raised Puddleton to its urban greatness. Not to know Puddleton argues yourself if not unknown at all events ungrateful, for you owe a great deal to Puddleton. However, instead of any longer falling foul of the readers' ignorance, let me at once proceed to enlighten it by stating that buttons are the comparative trifles from which so mighty a result as Puddleton's prosperity has sprung.

Now let me inform any reader who may be inclined to ridicule such a source of

greatness as Puddleton's that there is a great deal in a button. I do not mean in a material, sordid way, connected with clothing or trade. I mean in a general, social, historical, ethical kind of a way. In which of his characters does Shakespeare tread so close on the heel of the tragic Muse herself as to almost gall her kibe (if she has one)? King Lear. And what is the last dying request of this unfortunate old monarch? Is it the commendation of his subjects to his successor? or of his successor to his subjects? Neither. It is simply and touchingly "Pray you, undo this button." Now Shakespeare must have thought there was a great deal in a button, or he would not have introduced it on such an occasion.

Again, to descend from high tragedy to low comedy, and yet still to continue in the highest realms of genius, is

it not wholly and solely on a button that the ingenious plot which thickens round poor Mr. Winkle hangs when he is challenged to fight a duel? Here Dickens endorsed in one way what Shakespeare proved in another, that there is a great deal in a button. And even from the homely but vigorous phrase "Dash my buttons!" may the same lesson be learned. What a picture of dilapidation does the expression conjure up! "O what a falling-off is there!" might anyone exclaim who was to witness it. This peculiar form of commination is, too, as happy an instance of *brutum fulmen* as can be imagined. It is "mouth-filling" enough to have pleased Hotspur and yet not sufficiently strong to offend a Quaker. As little wanton boys experience in smashing a sheet of ice all the delights of breaking windows without any of the pains or penalties attaching to

that pastime, so in the use of the phrase "Dash my buttons!" there is all the excitement and dash and relief of swearing without any of the harm. But enough of Puddleton and the source of its greatness. Now turn we once again to the personification of that greatness, Puddleton's mayor. History repeats itself, and surely a mayor who lives in history may do the same.

"Don't talk nonsense, Georgina! I maintain that Puddleton is making itself utterly contemptible."

As Mr. Buddlecombe delivered this remark, he rose from his chair and stood on the hearthrug, which is to the domestic autocrat very much what the quarter-deck is to the captain of a man-of-war—the spot whence he fulminates the thunderbolts of his authority with the greatest effect. There was dogmatism—and dogmatism

too of the fiercest description—in every word, look, and gesture of the worshipful gentleman as he glared down upon the mayoress and discharged the marital injunction “Don’t talk nonsense” with full force at her. Mrs. Buddlecombe, however, in whose mind familiarity with these humours had bred, if not contempt, at all events a certain amount of indifference to them, merely shrugged her shoulders, and calmly continued her knitting.

“Notwithstanding all my efforts as the mayor of this town,” went on Mr. Buddlecombe, evidently working himself up into a rage, and to judge from his countenance he had not to work very hard against the grain—“notwithstanding indignation meetings convened by me, and protests, and petitions, and representations, Puddleton is made a military quarter; and instead of resenting the injury, Puddleton dresses

itself out in flags and determines upon giving a public welcome to these 'Crimean heroes,' as it chooses to dub these red-coated drumming and trumpeting individuals who have just been practising their legalised trade of wholesale murder on a pretty large scale."

"Nonsense, Joshua; think of the glory!" said Mrs. Buddlecombe, waving a knitting-needle with the air of a conquering heroine.

"Nonsense, Georgina; think of the depression in the button trade!" rejoined Mr. Buddlecombe. "Now if soldiers were habitually to fire away their buttons in action, as I believe they did on one occasion, they might give a fillip to the button trade, and war would not be such an utterly senseless proceeding as it is now."

"How on earth can the war have affected

the button-trade?" said Mrs. Buddlecombe. "I am sure I have not worn one button less since the declaration of hostilities, nor one button more since the conclusion of peace; and I do not suppose I am singular in these respects."

"Georgina," rejoined Mr. Buddlecombe loftily, "the state of the button-trade is not to be gauged by the number of buttons, more or less, that you or any other people wear. Trade is a wonderful, a sublime, a beautiful system, formed very much on the sympathetic principle of the human body. Injure it in one portion and the whole suffers. If you cannot bring a little more intelligence to bear on the subject, and a little more appreciation of its noble grandeur you had better leave it alone."

"I am quite willing to leave it alone," retorted Mrs. Buddlecombe, gradually

warming to her work. "And if you, Joshua, cannot bring a little more intelligence, as well as a little more tolerance, to bear on the military topic *you* had better leave *it* alone."

"I shall not do anything of the sort," said Mr. Buddlecombe. "It is my duty to denounce this festering sore on the face of civilisation whenever it crops up. I repeat that, with the advent this day of the military, Puddleton falls from the zenith of its fair fame to the nadir of disgrace; and my year's tenure of office, instead of being the brightest page in Puddleton's history, is and will be for ever a blot on its hitherto unspotted annals."

"Well," said Mrs. Buddlecombe, "I beg to state on *my* part, I am delighted to see that Puddleton takes a very different view of the matter, and deems it an honour, in-

stead of a foul disgrace, to be afforded the opportunity of welcoming with every mark of pride and joy these brave and victorious sons of old England. Yes, at this moment, we should not only be proud of our soldiers but we should feel grateful to them."

"Oh, do you know," said Mr. Buddlecombe, regarding his wife as if she had been a dose of the coldest drawn castor oil, "this turns one sick, positively sick. If the army were dressed like Quakers, and went about quietly when not engaged in slaughter, you would regard them with loathing. But simply because they bedizen themselves up in glaring colours, and bang a drum, and blow their own trumpet, a large majority of your sex, and I blush to add, a foolish portion of mine, are taken in, and think them wonderful fellows. I could fancy savages being impressed by a

red rag and a tom-tom ; or children pleased with the too-tooing of a trumpet. But civilised adults—Pshaw ! You place yourself, Georgina, in the same intellectual category with children and savages. You hear the voice of the charmer in the banging of a big drum, and your senses are dazzled with a red rag. Now, if you were only consistent in your childish and savage tastes, and derived ample amusement from a rattle, and thought a string of glass beads and a feather the height of personal adornment, I might find in the diminution of my current expenses some consolation for your fatuity.”

“ Red rag, indeed ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Buddlecombe. “ I am sure the term is much more appropriate in your case ; for the army is to you exactly what a red rag is to a bull. It drives you wild. Thank you, Joshua, for the hint. I

shall call the army, in future, your red rag."

Though a match for almost any woman with his tongue, Mr. Buddlecombe was temporarily silenced by this adroit turning of the tables, and Mrs. Buddlecombe, now thoroughly roused, followed up the attack :

"I am very glad, however, that your fellow-townsmen do not take the same bovine view of the red rag. From my experience of the place I really thought that Puddleton's soul was incapable of rising above buttons and their manufacture. But I am delighted to find that the sordid employment of making buttons, to which Puddleton, from the lowest to the highest, from the youngest to the oldest inhabitant, is addicted, has not deadened its mind to all feelings of glory and patriotism."

“Stuff and nonsense !” spluttered Mr. Buddlecombe. “The idea of disparaging the highly respectable, the ingenious, the useful employment of making buttons, and glorifying the disgraceful calling of slashing and cutting and shooting your fellow-creatures ! It’s outrageous ! To hear such sentiments proceed from the lips of any woman would be shocking ; but when that woman is a lady, and that lady is a mayoress, and that mayoress is the wife I have sworn to love and to cherish, it makes me tingle from head to foot with shame !”

Mrs. Buddlecombe was not in the least awed by this flowing climax.

“That sounds all very well, I daresay, Joshua, as a rhetorical display ; but I prefer plain English, and in that language I maintain that making buttons is an utterly contemptible occupation compared

with that of defending your country at the risk of your life. What," concluded Mrs. Buddlecombe, rising from her seat with the dignity befitting a mayoress,— "what would society be without its defenders, Joshua?"

"What would society be without its buttons, Georgina? I blush to think of society in a buttonless condition."

And here the Mayor of Puddleton assumed a mien of awful propriety, not altogether unmingled with a conscious air of having "scored one."

"You're really too ridiculous, Joshua," retorted Mrs. Buddlecombe, as she walked to a low French window and looked out into the garden, partly to see if her daughter, Florence, were returning from her morning's ride, and partly to hide just a little chagrin at this last effective parry and counter. "And you are so illogical,

Joshua," she continued as she turned from the window; "so provokingly illogical. Soldiers must be somewhere; and if they were not at Puddleton they would have to be at some other town. So they might just as well be here as anywhere else."

"Not at all," snapped Mr. Buddlecombe, turning sharp round on his wife. "Soldiers should be nowhere. They shouldn't exist. What's a standing army but a standing slur on civilisation, a glaring anachronism, a perpetual menace to peace and goodwill amongst men, a dangerous tool in the hands of ambition, a gigantic fraud on the ratepayer, a fierce seething whirlpool of temptation, into which——"

"O dear, O dear; I think we have heard that before," said Mrs. Buddlecombe, placing her hand to her ears.

"Don't dare to make me the subject

of your buffoonery, Georgina," said the irascible gentleman; "and don't dare to interrupt me either. I *shall* have my say! What is the whole army, to put it in its mildest light, but a ridiculous anomaly? We visit punishment with the utmost rigour of the law on the heads of wretched prize-fighters, who only maul each other about with their fists; and yet we maintain, at an enormous expense, thousands upon thousands of an infinitely more noxious variety of the species whose recognised business is slaughter and carnage, with every description of deadly engine that misdirected science can invent for their use. I employ the expression '*misdirected science*' advisedly. From a careful calculation which I have made with the view to exposing, by means of my next pamphlet, the unspeakable iniquity of war in, perhaps, its most shocking light, I find

that a 68-pounder gun—which, I am told, is now the *chef-d'œuvre* of murderous invention—would furnish enough material for exactly 1,341,537 metal buttons of the largest size we turn out—such buttons in fact as might be supplied to charity-schools.”

This last reflection was so painful that Mr. Buddlecombe paused, and, with a deep sigh, sought consolation in his snuff-box.

“How much more noble,” he continued, in somewhat calmer, though sad, tones, “how much more in accordance with the true fitness of things, if Government had converted all this mass of metal into such buttons”—here he took a final pinch of snuff, accompanied by the gentle soliloquy—“and given me the contract. I have calculated that, allowing eight buttons for each boy—six in front

and two behind—I could provide, out of a 68-pounder gun, buttons for 167,692 boys, and one button over. What a contrast do the two pictures afford! In the one, ghastly hecatombs of mangled humanity; in the other, 167,692 chubby-cheeked charity-boys, smiling and happy in the proud consciousness of possessing eight bright buttons apiece—to say nothing of the one button over. Is not the reflection, that the former picture is the chosen one, enough to wring the heart of any right-thinking man, woman, or child? Is not this, I say, enough——”

“Quite, Joshua,” said Mrs. Buddlecombe. “I say so too. *Quite* enough. No more, thank you.”

“In spite of these unseemly interruptions, Georgina, I shall continue to speak out my mind,” said the worshipful gentleman to whom degenerate Puddleton had .

turned a deaf ear on this subject, and who therefore, like most orators who cannot obtain a hearing abroad, made the most of his grievance at home. Not that he got much sympathy there, but still he could command an audience in the shape of his wife, and he exercised his matrimonial prerogative. "Oh, Georgina," he continued, "it cuts me to the heart to contemplate this return for my devotion. Is it for this that I am ever ready to be your slave and to victimise myself for you?"

"Would you mind, Joshua, just enumerating a few of the occasions when you immolate yourself on the sacrificial altar for my sake?" said Mrs. Buddlecombe very calmly. "I ask, as I wish to avoid one of the basest sins of omission, ingratitude; and it is impossible for me to feel, or to appear, sufficiently grateful for these con-

tinuous acts of sublime devotion, unless I know what they are. Pray enlighten me, Joshua. I shall perhaps be more grateful when I am less ignorant."

Mr. Buddlecombe winced a little under this sarcasm, and he defended himself rather lamely with :

"Well, to begin with, don't I frequently go out to dinner-parties with you?"

"Only where there's a good cook, Joshua."

"I do not pretend to be an angel, Georgina. I am only mortal. And it is as one mortal speaking to another that I now attempt to awaken in your heart some sense of duty you owe. Think of the sacrifices I make for your sake, and of the constant attention I show you. I give you beforehand all the speeches I am going to make on different occasions. I sometimes smoke a choice

cigar in the evenings after dinner in order that your senses may be pleasantly regaled with the delicate aroma. Oh, do you know the ingratitude of woman is shocking, shocking ! Then again, don't I often——”

“ Pray don't continue the harrowing narration,” said Mrs. Buddlecombe, with a provoking assumption of extreme contrition. “ I am quite aware, Joshua, of the fearful infliction it is to you to eat a good dinner, especially when you're very hungry, which it seems to me you always are ; and of the beautiful self-abnegation you evince when indulging in the delightful pastime of playing at being a modern Demosthenes ; and of the violence you do to your feelings, as a confirmed smoker, when you inhale the fragrant fumes of a choice havanna. Oh, Joshua, Joshua, what a heart-rending picture you have

drawn of the terrible sacrifices you make for my sake! It's quite affecting. It's more than I can bear."

Here Mrs. Buddlecombe buried her face in her handkerchief, and gave vent to a succession of ironical sobs, which gradually developed into an uncontrollable burst of hearty laughter.

The mayor's wrath was terrible to see; for irony and ridicule are the two keenest shafts that pierce the human soul.

"Georgina," he exclaimed, "there is not the noblest action of self-sacrifice from which, if I were to perform it, you would not withhold all credit on the grounds that it was done to please myself. I verily do believe that if I were to lay my head down on the block this moment, and have it cut off for your sake, your first remark would be: 'O, he *likes* it. Laying his

head down on the block and having it cut off has ever been his favourite pastime from childhood's earliest years.'"

Mrs. Buddlecombe merely smiled contemptuously ; upon which Mr. Buddlecombe, with increased acrimony, was just taking up another parable, when the sweet fresh voice of a young girl, warbling some joyous little ditty, floated through the open French window. Breaking in upon Mr. Buddlecombe's querulous tones, it was like the playful tinkling of a lambkin's bell after the fussy gruff barks of the old sheep-dog.

"There's Florry come in from her morning's ride," said Mrs. Buddlecombe.

"Yes ; now you'll be good enough not to introduce the military topic before her, Georgina," said Mr. Buddlecombe grimly. "No more rides for her alone

with old Reins, the coachman, now that the neighbourhood will be infested by reprobates in regimentals, I can tell her!"

As the worshipful mayor of Puddleton pronounced this sentence, he took up his newspaper and seated himself in an easy-chair. He had just settled down to the money article when the fair young warbler appeared at the open window, and arrested her footsteps and her song to stand surveying her parents with a playful demeanour, which, as regarded Mr. Buddlecombe, was not reciprocated. Florence Buddlecombe was an only child, and was still at the proverbially sweet age of seventeen, though in candour it must be added that she was just on the eve of her eighteenth birthday. With her soft blue eyes, her fair complexion, and her hair,

"A golden mesh to entrap the hearts of men,"

she would have carried off the palm for beauty in most assemblages of pretty girls. Then, too, she was an heiress ; and when viewed from this standpoint, she was supernaturally lovely. She had normally a sweet bright expression, but on this especial morning a heart filled with a secret joy illumined her countenance, until it was radiant with happiness, as well as with health, youth, and beauty.

As she stood at the French window, her lithe figure shown off to the greatest advantage in her close-fitting riding-habit, a jaunty hat perched knowingly on her well-shaped little head, her eyes dancing with joy, her cherry lips parted into a smile which showed the whitest and evenest row of teeth imaginable, and her soft cheeks aglow with the exercise in the fresh morning air, she formed a sweet

picture, at which Mrs. Buddlecombe gazed with fond and admiring eyes, but which only drew from Mr. Buddlecombe, as he glanced at the fair vision from over the top of his newspaper, a low growl that he didn't know what she had to grin so about this morning.

It must not be supposed that Mr. Buddlecombe was always thus—a bear with a sore head. The fact is that the reader, while having had the honour of introduction to so great a personage as the mayor of Puddleton, has also had the misfortune to make that magnate's acquaintance for the first time when he was boiling over with indignation at the conduct of Puddleton, on which he himself has been sufficiently the exponent.

“Well, papa,” said Florence gaily, as she advanced, and playfully tapped her

father's newspaper with her riding-whip, "why don't you have a flag flying from our flagstaff? Puddleton's *en fête*, and our house looks quite conspicuous by the absence of bunting."

A savage grunt from behind the newspaper was all the reply.

"Let your papa alone, Florry darling," said Mrs. Buddlecombe. "He's busy reading the paper. Come and tell me what you've been doing."

Thus enjoined, the light-hearted Florry rattled away, regardless, or rather, in the exuberance of her spirits, unconscious, of the nods and winks and frowns with which her mother sought to warn her off the dangerous ground.

"O, such fun, mamma! I met my dear old godpapa, Mr. Bolitho, riding on his cob, and he says the regiment will arrive at the railway-station very soon, and he

was going up there to see ; and he has promised to ride down to tell us when they're coming, so that we may go to the lodge and see them pass. And what *do* you think the dear funny old thing said ? He joked me so, and said I should be having half-a-dozen young officers at my feet, and that I mustn't get conceited and turn up my nose at old fellows like him. And the dear old thing laughed so, and said I wasn't to go falling in love with more than one at a time, and——”

Here Mr. Buddlecombe started to his feet and dashed his newspaper down.

“ Silence, prattling idiot !” he roared.
“ Babbling booby, be still !”

In one bound Florence was by her mother's side, where she stood cowering while Mr. Buddlecombe continued to pour out the vials of his wrath.

“Look here, Florence! If I ever hear another word of this vile trash, I’ll pack you off to your aunt Virginia in the North. Old Bolitho is a confounded old fool, and I consider him a very improper person to be your godfather. He isn’t fit to be at large, blasting youthful minds like a deadly upas-tree, and should be chained up. He’s ‘such a dear funny old thing,’ is he? And ‘you’ll have half-a-dozen young officers at your feet,’ will you? Much more likely they’ll have my feet at *them*. And you ‘mustn’t go falling in love with——’ I’ll tell you what it is: I’ll take precious good care you don’t. As long as this neighbourhood is contaminated by these scamps in regimentals, you’ll have uncommon few opportunities for seeing them at your feet, and all the rest of the trash of that miserable old dotard Bolitho. You’ll be confined to

these grounds, except when you go out with me ; and when you're out with me, if you even so much as glance at one of these puppies, I'll pack you off to your aunt Virginia in the North by the very next train. So mark my words, my vivacious young lady."

And here Mr. Buddlecombe turned on his heel and paced up and down the room, muttering to himself:

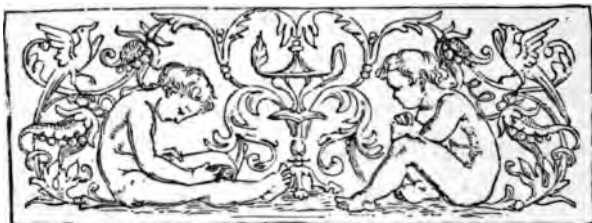
"Preposterous! That a girl to whom I give thirty thousand pounds on her wedding-day, and on whose education no expense has been spared, should be guilty of such abominable sentiments!"

Suddenly Mr. Buddlecombe stopped his furious promenade up and down the room ; and, turning sharp round, addressed Florence in ironical tones :

"I think you suggested that I should hoist a flag. A capital idea! Yes, I *shall*

hoist a flag to celebrate the entry of the military into Puddleton."

So saying, Mr. Buddlecombe bustled out of the room in a grimly mysterious manner.



CHAPTER II.

STARTLING DISCLOSURES.

“**D**ON'T cry, my dear Florry,” said Mrs. Buddlecombe; for Florence's great blue eyes, which a few moments before had been dancing with fun and joy, were now dim with tears. “You know your father's extraordinary antipathy to the military, Florry, and really you should have been more careful. There, never mind!”

“O yes, I know; it was very stupid of me,” said Florry, smiling through her tears. “But I couldn't help it, mamma.

My heart is so full this morning that I am even more impulsive than usual."

"So full, Florry! Full of what? And what is there in this morning to fill it so very full of anything?" asked her mother.

Florence played nervously with her riding-whip, blushed crimson, bit her lips, became pale, and then flushed again.

"Come, Florry, tell me," said her mother, in gentle affectionate tones, at the same time drawing her arm fondly round her daughter's slim waist.

"Well, mamma," said Florence, apparently engaged in an absorbing examination of the gold mounting on her riding-whip, "do you remember Mr. Warriner whom we met at Folkestone, when you and I were there alone together two summers ago?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"Well, this is his regiment, just re-

turned from the Crimea, that's expected at Puddleton to-day."

"Is it really? I am sure, child, I had quite forgotten what regiment he belonged to."

"I hadn't, mamma. I—I think you liked Mr. Warriner, didn't you?"

"Yes, particularly so, Florry. Handsome but not conceited, manly and yet gentle, thoroughly self-possessed and yet not forward, I thought him altogether one of the most charming young men I had ever met."

This panegyric brought the blood mantling proudly to Florence's cheek, and encouraged her to speak her mind out a little more plainly.

"You would not be astonished then to hear, mamma, that I—I——"

Here maidenly bashfulness stopped her, and Mrs. Buddlecombe was left to pick

up the delicate thread of their discourse.

“Not in the least astonished, Florry dear,” said Mrs. Buddlecombe, after a long, earnest gaze at her daughter. “I should have been astonished a few minutes ago; but I now know your secret without your having told it to me. Ah, Florry, it does not necessarily require a tongue to tell a tale of love. There are a thousand other modes and indications just as eloquent as, and more so very often than, words. Your father, for instance, first told *his* love by means of——”

“What, mamma, what?” asked Florence, with breathless interest, for Mrs. Buddlecombe had tantalisingly paused to sigh over the tender reminiscence.

“Mutton-chops, darling!”

“Mutton-chops, mamma!” screamed Florry. “O, how horrible!”

“Yes, mutton-chops, Florry. And now, having told you so much, I feel I had better tell you all. My mother was passionately fond of dogs, especially little ones, of which sort she always had three or four about her; and she frequently declared that they were better judges of human nature than humanity itself. One day, in the hearing of Joshua, who was paying us a visit, she stated her determination never to allow me to marry a man towards whom her dogs exhibited any marked antipathy, ‘for,’ said she, ‘I am convinced they, in common with all their species, possess the keenest intuition of good and evil in human nature.’ I did not notice it, but my mother did, and told me, some time afterwards, that upon this remark of hers a look of gloomy despair clouded Joshua’s brow, for he was not popular with my mother’s pets; and after

a visit to us he always took his departure considerably damaged about the shoe-laces and the edges of his trousers, owing to their persistent hostility. On his next visit, however, there was an extraordinary change in the behaviour of these little animals. They jumped and frisked about Joshua, and they fawned upon him. They even tried to get into his pocket, and when he went away it was all we could do to prevent them from following him.

“‘There,’ said my mother, ‘*that’s* the man I should like to see you married to, Georgina. That’s a man after my own heart.’

“‘O, nonsense, mamma,’ I said; ‘Mr. Buddlecombe has not an idea of me, I’m sure.’

“‘I’m sorry for it, my dear,’ said my mother; ‘for I am convinced he has an honest nature and a kind heart, or my dogs would never take to him as they do.’

“‘But,’ said I, ‘it is only to-day they seem to have taken to him. The last time he was here they evinced the fiercest animosity towards him. If he had been rats they could not have worried him more than they did. How do you reconcile that with your theory?’

“‘My dear,’ said my mother, with an impressiveness I shall never forget, ‘that is easily accounted for. *He has turned over a new leaf.*’

“The next visit Joshua paid us, the same sort of thing went on. The little dogs would not leave him for a moment, and they hung about him with a fondness which my mother said was quite touching, as I am sure Joshua himself must have found it, for they never left off touching him the whole time with their paws or their cold little noses. This raised him higher than ever in her estimation.

“ ‘He was,’ she said, ‘without exception, the best man she had ever come across; for never had she met a man to whom her little dogs had taken such a violent fancy.’

“ Unfortunately, however, my brother, your uncle Tom, Florry, came in to show us a mastiff he had just bought from a man in the streets.

“ ‘I don’t suppose he’s seen an ounce of meat for the last fortnight,’ said your uncle Tom, in his pleasant off-hand manner; ‘he’s half-starved now; but when I feed him up a bit he’ll be an out-and-out stunner, and as big as a donkey.’

“ ‘He seems quite fascinated with Mr. Buddlecombe; what an extraordinary, what a beautiful, I may say sublime, influence you seem to exercise over dogs!’ exclaimed my mother, in tones of the deepest admiration.

“‘Yes; but I—I find I’ve a pressing engagement,’ said your papa, in a strange, nervous manner, and rising from his chair.

“These words were hardly out of his mouth when a scene ensued which I shall never forget, Florry. The mastiff just took one sniff at Joshua, and the next moment Joshua was on his back on the hearth-rug, with the huge brute over him, devouring his very vitals, as we all thought to our horror. We soon thankfully discovered, however, that your father had sustained no personal injury. The skirts of his greatcoat were torn right off, and three mutton-chops were transferred with wondrous rapidity from the pocket of that garment to the interior of the voracious monster. The whole thing then flashed through my brain, and I may add my heart as well, that Joshua was trying to win my young untried affections, and then

my hand, by first gaining the good-will of my mother. But, Florry dear, never let your father know that I told you this little episode in his courtship. He has never been able to bear the sight of a mutton-chop since. But with *me* it is different. Mutton-chops are always tenderly associated in *my* mind with the first dawn of love——”

Here Mrs. Buddlecombe paused for a moment, and then added dreamily :

“Especially the flaps, for it was those parts of them we first saw protruding from Joshua’s pocket, and which, with a blood-curdling thrill of horror, I took for portions of his anatomy. I did not know until that awful moment how much I loved him.”

“O mamma, how horrible !” exclaimed Florence ; “how atrociously unromantic ! I’m glad the first dawn of *my* love has no

such vile associations. No," added the young girl, rapturously, "it is linked in fond memory with the warring of the elements as we stood together one stormy afternoon on the Lees at Folkestone, and gazed down on the white-crested waves of the English Channel——"

"With the *chops* of the Channel, in short," said Mrs. Buddlecombe, with a sly smile. "You see, Florry, there's a strong similarity in our cases, after all."

"O mamma," screamed Florry, stuffing her fingers into her ears, and laughing, "I won't listen; it's sacrilege."

"Well, but seriously, Florry darling, you're in love, eh?"

"O, irretrievably!" replied Florence, opening her eyes wide, and looking very solemn and determined.

"I am sorry for it. I had no idea it had been anything more than just a mild

little passing boy-and-girlish flirtation. I am *very* sorry for it, Florry."

"Why, mamma, why?" asked Florry, peering eagerly into her mother's eyes, while a startled look of pain and fear flitted into the fair young face.

"Because, my child," replied Mrs. Budlecombe, with a steadfast but tender gaze, "I fear no good can come of it. Your father will never countenance anything of the sort. I tremble to think of the effect the disclosure would have upon him. It would be like putting a lighted match into a barrel of gunpowder. Such is his blind unreasoning antipathy to the army, that I believe he would sooner see you married to a field-labourer than to a field-marshal."

"It makes me tremble too when I think of it; but I have an idea, mamma, that it will all come right in the end," said Florence, with that truly youthful belief in

the efficacy of the future. "And, O, after all the suspense of the last eighteen months, while he has been away in that dreadful land, that awful valley of the shadow of death, I feel this morning too happy in the consciousness of his safe return to think of anything more than that. What a happy day this is compared with that dark day of horror when I read in the newspapers, 'Severely wounded, Lieutenant Algernon Fitzmaurice Warriner, Queen's Own Fusiliers'! How I passed the time and kept up appearances before you all until the next mail brought better news, I know not!"

"Hush, Florry, here's your father!" said Mrs. Buddlecombe, who was not quite so intent in the listening as Florence was in the telling.

"I've hoisted my flag to celebrate the entry of the military into Puddleton," said

Mr. Buddlecombe, as he came fussing into the room; "and I've derived a certain amount of gloomy satisfaction from hoisting it half-mast high. If I had only had a black flag with a Death's head and cross-bones, I'd have hoisted *that*. But I hadn't, and so I used the Union Jack upside down instead. And if I only possessed sufficient experience in explosives, I'd further console myself by firing off minute-guns; or if my musical education had not been neglected, I'd play a solo on the muffled drum. That could hardly be construed into a manifestation of rejoicing by even the most bigoted admirer of the military. Moreover, if——"

Here a heavy footstep in the verandah outside, tramping in time to a hearty gruff-toned rendering of the "British Grenadiers," cut short Mr. Buddlecombe in the full flow of his rhetoric.

“Bother Bolitho!” heejaculated. “Everybody that comes to the house this morning seems to think it necessary to herald his or her approach with a song. First of all, Florence comes in caterwauling, and then this old porpoise Bolitho comes pounding along my verandah, and making a noise like a rhinoceros in a fit, which I’ve no doubt he calls singing.”

At this point, after humming the martial air up to the last moment before coming into view, Mr. Bolitho entered the room with a beaming smile on his fine red old face, his low-crowned broad-brimmed beaver in one hand and an enormous nosegay in the other. Mr. Bolitho, or “old Joe Bolitho,” as he was generally called in Puddleton and the neighbourhood, was a Puddletonian born and bred. He and Mr. Buddlecombe had been boys together, a fact he constantly alluded to with infinite relish.

He was a fine hearty old fellow of about eighteen stone in weight and sixty years of age. He was not exactly a congenial companion for a person whose nervous system was completely deranged; but for anyone in fair condition of mind and body, who did not mind a noise and an occasional prod in the ribs, there could not have been a jollier associate than old Joe Bolitho. By the young of both sexes he was idolised.

“Ah, how are you, my dear Mrs. Buddlecombe?” said Mr. Bolitho, as he threw his hat and the nosegay on to a table, and then seized the lady by both her hands. “Well, Florry, little girl, seen you before this morning. How are you, Buddle?” this last inquiry being accompanied by a poke in the worshipful ribs.

“Quite well, thank you, ‘mine own familiar friend,’” replied Mr. Buddlecombe,

resenting the liberty by drawing himself up into a dignified attitude, which was completely lost on Joe Bolitho.

"That's right. With the tow-row-row-de-dow-dow of the British——Excuse me, Mrs. Buddlecombe, excuse me, my dear lady, I am in such a state of martial enthusiasm that I can't help being a little demonstrative."

"I admire it in you, Mr. Bolitho. I only wish you could instil a little of your fine patriotic feeling into a certain other individual," said Mrs. Buddlecombe, while Mr. Buddlecombe sought refuge in his newspaper, his usual sanctuary.

"And what's that enormous bouquet for, Mr. Bolitho?" asked Florence.

"That, Florry? That's for you to throw at the head of the column as it marches past the lodge-gates," said Mr. Bolitho, seizing the bouquet, and waving it enthu-

siastically over his head : "Beauty crowning Valour !"

"Nothing of the sort," said Mr. Buddlecombe, lowering his newspaper and glaring fiercely over it. "Florence, if you dare to crown valour I'll send you to bed and stop your pocket-money !"

"Then *I* shall, Mr. Bolitho !" said Mrs. Buddlecombe, with an extremely majestic bearing, accompanied by an insubordinate glance at her spouse.

"*You!* Do you consider, Mrs. Buddlecombe, that you are fitted at your time of life to enact the part of Beauty?"

And here Mr. Buddlecombe, having propounded this question, rose from his chair and awaited the answer with his hands under his coat-tails.

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Buddlecombe, stung to the quick by this unmanly, this brutal allusion to a lady's age. "Certainly ;

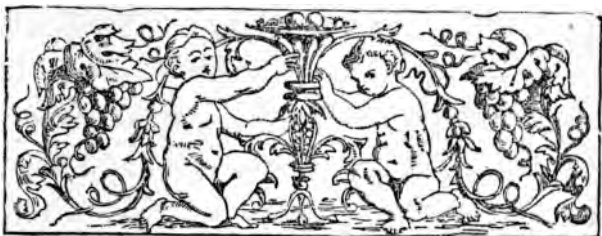
for *you*, Mr. Buddlecombe, are playing the companion *rôle* to such perfection : Beauty and the—ahem !” This last with a significant wave of the hand towards her husband.

“Ha, ha, ha !” roared old Bolitho.
“Bravo, Mrs. Buddlecombe ! I say, Buddle, old fellow, that’s one to Mrs. B. !
Ha, ha, ha !”

“It may be one to Mrs. B., Bolitho,” snapped Mr. B. ; “but it’s nothing to *you*. At any rate I wish you wouldn’t make such a noise about it.”

“Ha, ha, ha !” again roared the incorrigible old Joe.

“Bolitho should be muffled and sunk down a well when he’s in a facetious mood, and then one might delude oneself into the belief that he was only distant thunder,” snarled Mr. Buddlecombe, as he stumped off to his arm-chair and his newspaper in high dudgeon.



CHAPTER III.

CONQUERING HEROES.



R. BOLITHO, in his own boundless good-nature, was proof against his old boy-friend's ill-temper ; so all he said, when Mr. Buddlecombe plumped himself down into an arm-chair, and retired with a grunt behind his newspaper, was,

“ Ah, Buddle, my boy, you're not yourself to-day.”

“ Never mind him, Mr. Bolitho ; he's hardly a responsible being this morning,” said Mrs. Buddlecombe. “ Now tell us

about the arrival of the regiment ; we're longing to hear," she added, in lower tones.

"Yes, do, Mr. Bolitho. Do you know, I think I must have caught some of your enthusiasm," whispered Florence, archly.

"Well, they'll soon pass," replied Mr. Bolitho, without the slightest attempt at abating *his* voice. Indeed, of that he was incapable. When Nature had provided him with a *vox humana* she had altogether omitted the *piano* stop. "I was up at the station and saw the brave fellows arrive ; and I've had a delightful morning. I've cheered until I feel as if I had swallowed a nutmeg-grater ; and I've shaken their hands until I thought my arm was going to drop out of its socket. Capital fun ; first-rate fun !"

"*Sharkung a song goo*," muttered Mr. Buddlecombe, who was a dreadful old

gourmand, and having very recently imported a long-sighed-after luxury, in the shape of a French cook, now entertained for the beautiful language in which his bills of fare were daily couched a tender passion, which he vented in an occasional French expression.

That his acquaintance with the language was limited, and his pronunciation of it villanous, is only what can be said of most of even the educated classes of his countrymen twenty years ago. The *entente cordiale*, with its reciprocity in language, if not in trade, was not as firmly cemented then as it is now, and even at the present day there are many highly-educated Englishmen, perfect masters of their own language, who pronounce French no better than Mr. Buddlecombe did, a quarter of a century ago. Consequently his shortcomings in French orthoepy must not be

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taken to indicate that he was either vulgar or uneducated.

"I never," continued Mr. Bolitho, in the same excited strain, "recognised so fully the fitness of the term 'rank and *file*,' as when I shook those gallant hands, rough with the grasp of the rifle."

Mrs. Buddlecombe was quite carried away by the heartiness of this sentiment; and so was Mr. Buddlecombe, but in a different direction.

"I should like to shake hands with the whole regiment; from the colonel down to the smallest drummer!" she exclaimed.

"Mrs. Buddlecombe," said old Joe Bolitho, seizing both her hands, while Mr. Buddlecombe's paper rustled ominously, "my dear Mrs. Buddlecombe, that sentiment does you honour. It is a sentiment which should fill the hearts of all the

countrywomen of those men who have braved death by battle and pestilence in a noble and complete vindication of their country's honour. The memory of their deeds should be vividly in our minds this day. How well I remember the graphic descriptions of the glorious fighting which appeared in our papers from time to time, and stirred the heart of old England to its very core! Something of this sort: 'The Guards are hotly engaged; the shots fly like hail; the shells scream through the air; the rattle of musketry is incessant; but not a man wavers, except to fall, badly hit.' Bravo! Well done! 'Up Guards, and at 'em!'

Here old Joe Bolitho burst forth once more into a few notes of the "British Grenadiers," after which he continued, with unabated zest:

"The Rifles on the right are hard

pressed ; they are in danger of being cut off, and are fighting against fearful odds.' Well done, Rifle Brigade !

“ ‘ I am ninety-five, I am ninety-five,
But to keep single I'll contrive.’ ”

“ To keep quiet I wish *you'd* contrive,” muttered Mr. Buddlecombe, in a voice tremulous with suppressed feeling.

“ That's the quick march of the Rifle Brigade, Mrs. Buddlecombe ; to which, as the old 95th, they marched so often in the Peninsula to death or glory,” said Mr. Bolitho, who then resumed, with increased fire, “ ‘ Bring up the guns ! Up they come ; splendidly led !’ Ah, as the song says :

“ ‘ They're the boys as minds no noise,
Is the Royal Artilleree.’ ”

“ Don't mind a noise, eh ? ” said Mr. Buddlecombe, with a forced calmness.

“Bolitho should join that corps. He’d be the right man in the right place, then.”

“‘The guns are in danger!’” roared old Bolitho, quite unconscious in his excitement of Mr. Buddlecombe’s running commentary, and also becoming a little “mixed” in his declamation. “‘Highlanders, to the rescue! Scots wha hae wi’ Willie brew’d a peck o’ maut. True to their glorious traditions, the men grasp their gleaming pibrochs; the officers wave their trusty philibegs over their heads; while high above the din of battle rise the wild notes of the sporran. Glorious! Glorious!’ Hoop-là! Bother it; I mean Hoot, mon! ‘A cheer rings along the line; and on come the splendid fellows to the soul-stirring sound of their bagpipes.’ Hieland Laddie.”

And here old Bolitho actually vented

his enthusiasm by an imitation of the bagpipes. The effect on Mr. Buddlecombe was fearful. He sprang to his feet, dashed his newspaper down for the third time, strode up to Bolitho, planted himself in front of that worthy, and poured forth the following with a terrific volubility, which went like the rush of a torrent :

“ Bolitho ! *Bo-litho* ! we were boys together ; we knuckled down tight together ; we flew the garter together ; we fought together ; we have grown up together ; we have grown grey together. Consequently you are on those terms of intimacy with me which permit you to do pretty nearly what you like in my house. But I must draw the line somewhere. And I draw it at imitations of the national music of Scotland. *That's* a thing which *no* one could stand who hadn't been weaned on Glenlivat whisky ; and I happen to have subsisted

for the first few months of my existence on a somewhat milder beverage."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Bolitho. "Brought up by hand, I should think, on a nice mild little mixture of cayenne-pepper, petroleum, and gun-cotton."

"What *are* you to do with such a rhinoceros-hided old buffoon?" said Mr. Buddlecombe, turning on his heel with an air of the deepest disgust.

"Well, well, we shan't quarrel about it, Buddle; my boy," said Mr. Bolitho, soothingly, "you say we fought together as young boys. Well, we won't as old ones. But for the life of me, I can't recollect that particular fight.

"O yes, we had, though, Bolitho," said Mr. Buddlecombe, as if he had not the slightest intention of allowing his laurels to be snatched from him. "O yes, we had, and I whopped you. That was the

term we used in those days—*whopped*. I mayn't go strutting about blowing trumpets, and beating drums, and waving flags as *your* heroes do ; but nevertheless I whopped you, Bolitho, and, what's more, you admitted yourself vanquished."

"Very well, so be it," said old Bolitho, laughing. "History repeats itself, and I give in again. It always pleases him," added the hearty old fellow aside ; "I think he must have dreamed it."

"Hush ! listen," said Florence softly, as Mr. Buddlecombe bustled off on a fourth attempt to read his newspaper. "I think I hear the band."

"*I* don't hear anything," said Mrs. Buddlecombe.

"Neither do I," said old Bolitho.

"Yes ; *I do* hear it," said Florence, getting as pale as a lily and holding up a finger.

Then Mrs. Buddlecombe and Mr. Bolitho each held up a finger and stood intently listening, while Mr. Buddlecombe, who had now once more intrenched himself behind his *Times*, glared over the top of his paper parapet at them with savage contempt.

Florence was right. Love may be blind, but it can hear uncommonly well. Faintly, but unmistakably, the strains of a military band playing a quick march, mingled with the hoarse sound of distant cheering, fell on their listening ears.

“Yes, there they are, just leaving the station!” said old Bolitho, excitedly. “We shall only just have time to get down to the lodge and settle ourselves comfortably before they pass. Come along, Mrs. Buddlecombe. Come along, Florry.”

And before Florry had time to answer or offer any resistance, her eccentric old

godfather snatched up the huge bouquet with one hand, seized her round the waist with the other, and ran her through the French window.

For the fourth time was the newspaper dashed to the floor, and Mr. Buddlecombe rushed to the window.

“Florence! Come back, miss!” he shouted. “If you so much as dare even to look—O, she’s gone! She’s clean off with that detonating old dotard!”

And here Mr. Buddlecombe re-entered the room in a towering passion, and confronted his wife on her way to the open window.

“Joshua,” said Mrs. Buddlecombe, arresting her footsteps, and speaking in calm, collected, and forcible tones, “you betray a deplorable want of tact and knowledge of human nature. If you are anxious to pre-dispose your daughter favourably towards

these young officers ; if, in plain language, you want her to fall over head and ears in love with the first one she sees, you are, by abusing them, going exactly the right way to work. I speak from experience. I'm sure I never felt so much inclined to fall in love with you as when my sainted and prophetic mother—*prophetic*, Joshua, I use the term advisedly—as when my *prophetic* mother said she was quite convinced you would turn out a perfect brute.”

Having poured this raking broadside into her consort, Mrs. Buddlecombe swept majestically from the room, and as she stepped out on to the verandah, looked over her shoulder with a beaming smile, and sweetly warbled :

“ ‘ O, isn't he a darling,
The brave soldier-boy ! ’ ”

For several moments the worshipful

Mayor of Puddleton stood in the centre of the room completely dumbfounded.

“There,” he at last exclaimed to an attentive congregation of furniture, “there’s the effect of the military! For nearly a quarter of a century have Georgina and I hit it off with tolerable tranquillity. We have certainly had a protracted struggle for supremacy of many years’ duration, but we have not, as a rule, if ever, descended to personal abuse. On the bare approach of the military, however, she becomes rampagious, calls me a brute, and sings an improper song. ‘O, isn’t he a darling,’ indeed! I am not certain that after that revolting expression of Georgina’s sentiments I should not be justified in suing for a divorce *a vinculo matrimonii*. O Frailty, thy name is—Georgina Buddlecombe! Is not even the home of a mayor safe from the baneful influence of a licentious

soldiery? There they go, the noisome noisy brood, turning this once pure and peaceful Puddleton into a pandemonium !”

This last alliterative sentence referred to the strains of the band, which during the above had been getting louder and louder, until now in a rich wave of sound they broke upon Mr. Buddlecombe’s ears. Mingling with the music were the cheers of the crowd and the peals of joy-bells from many a church-steeple.

“O, isn’t that enough to drive anyone in his senses out of them !” ejaculated Mr. Buddlecombe. “Are these legalised and caressed assassins and cut-throats to be allowed thus to turn the beautiful harmony of Puddleton’s existence into this abominable discord? Not if I can help it. No military man shall ever darken *my* door with his presence, or may I be——”

Here most opportunely a sudden appari-

tion at the open window diverted Mr. Buddlecombe's thoughts. It was that of a man, all in white from head to foot, enthusiastically waving a ladle over his head.

"*Vive la gloire!*" shouted the man in white, with his eyes starting out of his head, and the corners of his mouth going up as if anxious to occupy the sockets directly they became vacant. "*Vive ze allies of la France! Vive Napoléon! En avant! Peep-peep-purée!*"

And with one final and frantic wave of his ladle, he dashed on to join the throng of spectators, wildly vociferating, "*Peep-peep-purée!*" which there are some grounds for believing was an attempt at an English cheer.

"Dear me! that's my new French cook," said Mr. Buddlecombe, quite taken aback for a few moments. "Hi!" he shouted, as he recovered himself and rushed to the window; "hi! I say! *C'est magnifique,*

mais ce n'est pas what you're paid your salary for, *mong garsong !*"

It is hardly necessary to add that this had not the slightest effect; and Mr. Buddlecombe was returning once more to his chair, with a superhuman effort at resignation, when a housemaid ran past the window, brandishing a dustpan and shrilly shouting :

"Three cheers for the soldiers ! 'Ip-'ip-'ip-'ooray !"

"One month's warning from this day, you shrieking Jezebel !" shouted Mr. Buddlecombe from the window.

Then a footman ran past cheering, and at him the worshipful gentleman felt desperately inclined to hurl an adjacent *ormolu* ornament; then a scullerymaid, waving a duster, and shouting :

"Down with the perlice ! The milingtary for ever !"

“O, do you know, if this sort of thing goes on,” said Mr. Buddlecombe, in tones of blank despair, “the whole house will be converted into a lunatic asylum, and I shall enjoy the luxury of a strait-waistcoat and a padded cell all to myself. I—I—I feel at this moment that if it wasn’t for my naturally phlegmatic and calm disposition I should break down under the mental strain.”

So saying, Mr. Buddlecombe was just about to take a seat, when an obsequious individual of between fifty and sixty years of age, in a swallow-tailed coat and pepper-and-salt trousers, entered the room with a deference that was almost abject. This was Mr. Spigot, the butler.

“Why don’t *you* go and cheer, Spigot?” said Mr. Buddlecombe, with grim irony.

“No, your worship,” replied Spigot, who was quite aware of his master’s anti-

pathy to the army. "I have taken the liberty of coming to convince your worship by my presence that I wouldn't demean myself by doing so. I don't approve of the military, your worship. Far from it. The only good I know of soldiers is, that they're a bit of a hantidote to the police. When a young girl forms a hopeless attachment for a policeman, she cures herself by falling in love with a soldier. That's the only good I know of soldiers, and that, your worship, is a recommendation I don't think worth going and hollering myself hoarse over."

"Spigot," said Mr. Buddlecombe, warmly, "you have proved yourself worthy of the position of trust which you hold. This is the first bright spot this morning in the opaque darkness of a transaction pregnant with disgrace to Puddleton."

"Certainly, your worship," said the

obsequious Spigot; and with a low bow he withdrew.

“I wonder what abominable folly my wife and daughter, under the leadership of that elderly buffoon Bolitho, are up to,” thought Mr. Buddlecombe, as he went to the window, and looked out. “Hullo! what do I see?” he exclaimed, starting with indignation. “Georgina, in the character of Beauty, is about to ‘crown Valour,’ and is preparing to throw the bouquet at the Colonel with all that elaboration of gesture peculiar to the feminine method of taking a shot! Georgina, you’re disgracing——”

What had happened? The band stopped playing in evident confusion—the first instrument to give in being the big drum and the last the piccolo; which on such occasions always *will* have the last squeak. At the same time Mr. Buddlecombe’s

demeanour underwent a startling change. In the midst of a most scathing denunciation of his wife's conduct, his contracted brow relaxed, and he burst into a loud laugh. He held his sides ; he smote first one leg and then the other ; he rocked himself backwards and forwards, and he laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks. The shortest way to enlighten the reader, who is no doubt eager to trace this extraordinary effect to its cause, is to give the spasmodic utterances which escaped the worshipful gentleman himself in a series of gasps and wheezes and chuckles.

“ O dear, she's crowned Valour with a vengeance ! She's hit the Colonel's charger over the head with her bouquet, and he's reared up, and then put his near off-leg, or whatever they call it, through the big drum. And the whole procession is thrown

into confusion. And old Joe Bolitho, who has rushed through the lodge-gates to apologise, is falling a victim to popular indignation. O, delicious! Yes, I'll cheer; I'll cheer *now!*"

And standing on tip-toes at the window, Mr. Buddlecombe put his hand to the side of his mouth, and gave vent to his feelings.

"Hooray! hooray! Go it! Give it to old Bolitho! He's always at his practical jokes! He did it on purpose! Duck him in the horse-pond, and I'll pay for any damage he does to the bottom! Hooray!"

These ebullitions speedily brought Mr. Spigot on the scene again, aghast and alarmed.

"Why, he's gone off his worshipful chump!" gasped the faithful old retainer, after standing for several moments in

speechless astonishment; "and what with all his tantrums it's my opinion he hadn't very far to go."

"Come and cheer, Spigot," exclaimed Mr. Buddlecombe, suddenly catching sight of him. "Come and cheer."

"Certainly, your worship."

And Spigot, joining his master at the window, gave vent to a laboured "Hooray!"

"Throw a little more derision into your cheers, Spigot," said Mr. Buddlecombe, sharply. "You must remember they're *derisive* cheers."

"Certainly, your worship. Hoo——"

"O, get away!" snapped Mr. Buddlecombe, relapsing into his former mood as suddenly as he had emerged from it. "Be off with you!"

"Certainly, your worship," said Spigot; adding, as he hurriedly sidled out of the

room. "He turns sour as suddenly as a barrel of beer in a thunderstorm."

What was the matter *now* with Mr. Buddlecombe? Jealousy was the matter. The green-eyed monster had seized him in the midst of his banter.

"This sight maddens me!" he exclaimed, as with clenched fists and scowling brow he stood glaring on the enemy at his gates. "Georgina waves her handkerchief to the Colonel, and the Colonel kisses the tips of his white gloves to Georgina. Chartered libertine, beware! She's mine. I'll call him out. I don't know, though. He rather looks as if he'd come. No, I won't call him out. I'll call Georgina in. She rather looks as if she wouldn't. However, I'll try. Georgina! Georgina!"

Just at this moment, however, the band struck up again; and Mr. Buddlecombe, after uplifting his voice in vain for several

moments, retired into the room, and walked up and down it with an agitated demeanour.

“Ridiculous nonsense all this drumming and trumpeting ; only fit to impose upon a few nurserymaids and weak-minded youths,” he contemptuously ejaculated, as he paced the room.

Nevertheless, he had not taken many turns when he became slightly influenced by the martial strains, and after a little he gradually and unconsciously assumed quite a military strut.

“Martial enthusiasm, indeed !” he continued. “All stuff and nonsense. How ridiculous I should look pointing my toes and holding my head up in the air !”

With this last remark of his he became a striking instance of the difficulty we all experience in seeing ourselves as others see us, for holding up his head and point-

ing his toes was just the very thing he was doing as hard as he could.

“What senile folly, old soldiers fighting their battles over again! How can they be such old fools! I fought old Bolitho, though, when we were boys together. O yes, I did. And I licked him too! O yes, one doesn’t go bragging about fighting, but still we’re all there when we’re put to it. Rather! I know an old idiot who is rather proud of having been at Waterloo. If that isn’t false pride, I don’t know what is. How well I recollect my fight with Bolitho! But *he* doesn’t. With a view to mitigating the horrors of war as much as possible, I stipulated, previous to the combat, that hitting in the face wasn’t to be fair. At the second round Bolitho hit me what we called then a one-er—a *fearful* one-er on the nose. I didn’t wait for a two-er;

but, with the wonderful promptitude which has characterised all my actions in life, I took up a commanding position on the broad of my back, and from that coign of 'vantage dictated terms to the effect that I claimed the victory on the grounds of breach of contract. O yes! I mayn't go bragging about like Bolitho and these puppies in red coats, but I've got a spice of the fighting devil about me when my blood's up."

PART II.

LOVE'S MANŒUVRE. *



CHAPTER I.

DISCUSSING THE MAYOR.



HE Queen's Own Fusiliers speedily shook down in their new quarters ; and officers, non-commissioned officers, and men, with a lively sense of the hearty welcome they had received from Puddleton, devoted themselves, in their several spheres, to the cultivation of that friendly intercourse with their civilian neighbours, which a very high authority on military matters has laid down as a duty of the highest importance,

incumbent on all ranks of the army during the piping times of peace.

Of course after returning from active service leave was granted to as many as could possibly be spared, and the regiment was consequently reduced to a skeleton ; but what was left of it fully upheld the regimental reputation for sociability and hospitality. Of all the guests bidden to the officers' mess old Joe Bolitho was the most honoured. There was a genuine heartiness about the old fellow, that at once took them all by storm. He was not only hearty in manner, but also hearty in deed ; and for the first few days after the arrival of the regiment, until the officers' mess was open, his comfortable bachelor quarters were open morning, noon, and night for such of the officers as chose to breakfast, lunch, dine, or sleep under his hospitable roof.

One evening, within a week of the eventful morning so fully described in the preceding chapters, Mr. Bolitho sat in the anteroom at the barracks in the midst of a sociable little circle of Fusiliers. There had been other civilian guests at dinner; but all had departed except Mr. Bolitho, and his broad-backed, old-fashioned swallow-tail was the only black coat in the room.

"Well," said Major Burstrap, a fine fat old veteran, who commanded the regiment in the absence of the Colonel on leave, "your townsmen, Mr. Bolitho, are wonderfully civil and attentive, with the exception, I must add, of your worshipful Mayor."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed old Bolitho. "I'm afraid none of your cloth will get much civility and attention from my cantankerous old friend, Joshua Buddlecombe."

"No, we don't expect it," said an officer. "We heard, directly we came here, that he was rabid against soldiers."

"Rabid! I should think he was," said Bolitho. "Why, he called me a deadly upas-tree, blighting the innocence of his daughter, a few days ago, merely because I happened to mention something about the regiment in her presence. Ha, ha, ha! But, bless you, I don't mind what names he calls me, for we were boys together."

"By Jove! what an awfully pretty girl the daughter is!" said Lieutenant Spoonbill.

"Why, where on earth did you see her?" asked Mr. Bolitho, in considerable astonishment; "for, to my certain knowledge, she has not been allowed outside the grounds ever since you marched in, and a pretty good piece of my mind have I given old Buddlecombe on the subject."

"Oh, we saw her yesterday," replied Spoonbill, "from the top of the regimental drag over the high garden-wall, as we drove past. She was walking along reading a letter, and when she looked up she did more execution in our ranks, by Jove, than the Russians ever did. The only one who didn't seem hit was Warriner, who was sitting next to me."

"Ah, Warriner, my boy," said old Bo-litho, with a kind and admiring glance at a handsome young fellow with his right arm in a sling, "Cupid, after all, is more discriminating and generous than I gave the young rogue credit for. He remembers you have been badly hit already in the service of his father, Mars, and he aims his shafts elsewhere."

"Yes, I suppose that's it," said young Warriner, carelessly, "and I'm sure I'm

much obliged to his impship for his forbearance."

"Or is it the memory of another's charms, my dear boy, that renders you invulnerable?" said old Bolitho. "'So faithful in love and so dauntless in war,' eh? Is that your case, Warriner?"

There was a kindness in the old man's *badinage*, which, together with the difference in the ages of himself and Warriner, cleansed it of all offensiveness, and the young man, who most assuredly would have resented such a liberty from any other stranger, allowed the old fellow's remark to pass with a shrug of the shoulders and a good-natured smile.

"I am told," said old Major Burstrap, who, having arrived at that age when the seat of the affections seems to take a downward direction, was anxious to change the conversation into a channel more con-

genial to the promptings of his heart, "I am told that the Mayor has a first-rate French cook."

Old Bolitho turned his eyes up, heaved a deep sigh, and stroked his waistcoat. The eloquence of this beautiful pantomime was not lost upon Major Burstrap.

"And I am told, too, the best port in the county; is that the case?" he continued, with visible emotion.

Old Bolitho again sighed and murmured, "Wonderful, wonderful!"

"Really it is a thousand pities," said Major Burstrap, in a beautiful spirit of Christian meekness, "that this unfortunate antipathy to us should be allowed to exist a day longer. It makes one feel positively uncomfortable to know that we are objects of such undying rancour. One so seldom, nowadays, comes across really good port, that—— Dear me, I mean it is our duty

as Christian gentlemen to do everything in our power to remove this impression. That was what I was going to say, when you so unceremoniously interrupted me, Smithers."

"I didn't say anything, Major," replied little Ensign Smithers, very meekly.

"No, but you *looked* as if you were going to, and that is quite as disconcerting—more so, in fact. Don't do it again, my dear fellow."

"Very well, sir."

"That's right," said the fat old Major, with touching forgiveness. "Now, Mr. Bolitho, don't you think you could act as peacemaker between your worthy Mayor and ourselves?"

"When oil and vinegar amalgamate, but not until then, I fear," replied old Bolitho. "Nothing short of a miracle will ever alter his opinion of you. I know him well, for

we were boys together. He would as soon think of asking a rattlesnake to his table as one of your distinguished profession."

"One wouldn't care a rap, you know, if it wasn't that he had such a pretty daughter," said Lieutenant Spoonbill.

"And such a beautiful cook," added Major Burstrap. "Dear me, there you are again, Smithers, throwing me completely off what I intended to say."

"I really did not even *look* as if I was going to speak this time, Major," expostulated the meek little Smithers.

"No, I know you didn't; but that's just where it is. I felt you were belying your looks. Now do exercise a little more self-control, my dear fellow."

"Very well, sir."

"That's right. Now, Mr. Bolitho, can nothing be done to convince your worthy

Mayor that we are respectable members of society?"

"Nothing, Major. He's a confirmed lunatic on that point."

It being now very late, old Bolitho tore himself away from the pleasant company with considerable difficulty. As he walked home he thus soliloquised :

"I tell you what, it's just as well my little god-daughter Florry won't have a chance of seeing that young fellow Alger-non Warriner. My heart warms to the good-looking plucky youngster. What an old ass Josh Buddle is !"



CHAPTER II.

AN EVENTFUL HALF-HOUR.



VER since the introduction of the French cook, it was Mr. Buddlecombe's custom, when not dining from home, to repair in the evening about half an hour before the dinner-time to his snug library, opposite the dining-room, there to con over the *menu* with the assistance of Florence, who knew a little more French than he did. "For," said Mr. Buddlecombe, "I always like to look before I leap."

In conformity with this rule, Florence was at her post one evening about three weeks after the Queen's Own Fusiliers took Puddleton by storm.

"Dear me," she exclaimed as she entered the room, charmingly dressed for dinner, and glanced at the clock over the mantelpiece; "how early I am! Papa won't be here for a little yet. I shall have time for just another read."

Taking from the bosom of her dress a letter which she kissed rapturously, Florence broke into a dreamy monologue:

"O, if papa only knew that ever since the regiment arrived here I have been in regular communication with Algy through the postal medium of a crack in the garden-wall! and that we have spoken lots of times! If papa only knew it, I wonder what he'd do! As to mamma, she thinks Algernon perfection; but she says she

would never run counter to papa's wishes, and he is, if possible, more rabid than ever against the army and everyone connected with it. Mamma has certainly made a concession. 'Florry,' she said, 'when I see Mr. Warriner a guest at your father's table by your father's own invitation, I promise you faithfully I shall throw all my weight'—and that's saying a great deal in mamma's case—'into your cause.' But I'm afraid mamma only said that because she knew the conditions were utterly impossible. Though if we could only get her on our side success would be merely a question of time, I believe; for with all papa's bluster he generally gives in to mamma in the long-run. I'm afraid this would be a very long run, though. In fact, not a run at all—more of a crawl. I told all this to Algy, and his letter to me to-day nearly takes my breath away. O,

what mad folly is he contemplating! I'll just have one more read:

“ ‘DARLING FLORRY,

“ ‘I have been thinking over what your mother has said about never countenancing our engagement until I am a bidden guest at your father's table. Now, my dear little Florry, where there's a will there's a way, and I mean to dine with you and your esteemed parent, the worshipful Mayor of Puddleton, this very evening. That capital old fellow, Mr. Bolitho, tells me he dines with you to-night, so we shall be quite a pleasant little party. You say you are quite sure your mother will keep her promise; and with her on our side we shall be over the stiffest fence, with nothing before us but comparatively plain-going.

“ ‘Your devoted and loving

“ ‘ALGERNON.’

“Mean to dine with us to-night! O, what mad impracticable scheme can Algy be contemplating? I’m afraid his heart has quite run away with his head. How I wish I could communicate with him, and implore him to give up this insane project! But, of course, our *poste restante*, the crack in the garden-wall, won’t be called at. What *can* he mean? He surely can’t intend to obtrude himself by force! O no! In the first place, Algernon is too much of a gentleman for that; and in the second, it would not be fulfilling the conditions, for that would not be by papa’s invitation. O, I know; he’s going to dress up as a woman. No; that can’t be it. He would look such a monster in petticoats that he couldn’t escape detection. And then he couldn’t, O, he couldn’t have the heart to shave off that lovely moustache! O Algy, Algy, what an agonising state of perplexity

you have thrown your loving Florry into !
And to think, too, I shall have to meet
papa in a few moments with a smiling
countenance and a composed manner to
read over that abominable *menu* to him !
What sacrilege, reading a bill of fare after
Algy's letter ! I shall just have time for
one more read of the precious note :

“ ‘Darling Florry——’

“ O no, I shan't. Good gracious, here's
papa coming down the stairs !”

* * * * *

Mr. Buddlecombe was no exception to
the general rule that every man has two
sides to his nature. The one first presented
to the reader happened to be the rough
side ; but, as already stated, or rather
implied, Mr. Buddlecombe had a smooth
one, and it is now the pleasanter task of
the chronicler to show our worshipful
Mayor on *this* side uppermost.

Between the gentle zephyr coquetting with a weathercock until the shy old stupid doesn't know which way to turn, and rude Boreas uprooting trees, dismasting ships, and unroofing houses, there is not a greater difference than between Mr. Buddlecombe as he is now about to appear, and Mr. Buddlecombe as the reader last saw him, dashing his newspaper on the floor, giving his servants warning all round, railing at the defenders of his country, abusing the friend of his youth, storming at the wife of his bosom, and fiercely hurling at his innocent offspring such epithets as "prattling idiot" and "babbling booby."

It has been deemed advisable to offer these preliminary remarks, as the reader would not otherwise recognise Mr. Buddlecombe in the dapper beaming old gentleman who now entered his own snug library, resplendent in a snowy shirt-front, white

waistcoat, glossy pumps—in short, dressed for dinner. It is common to most fidgety old gentlemen to become happy and docile *after* dinner; but Mr. Buddlecombe had lately, by taking a leaf from Akenside's "Pleasures of Imagination," hit upon a method of snatching an *anteprandial* dream of joy from life's fitful sleep.

"Ah, little Florrikins," he said, on entering the room, this mode of address, if frivolous for a mayor, being still a marked as well as remarkable improvement on "babbling booby," "it was a bright idea that reading over the *maynoo* together every evening before dinner, wasn't it, you saucy little puss?"

"Yes, papa dear, a very bright idea," acquiesced Florence, adding aside, with a surreptitious pout, "Horrible sacrilege, reading a nasty bill of fare after Algy's sweet letter!"

“And here in this nice little room, replete with every comfort, we are always secure from interruption,” continued Mr. Buddlecombe, beaming all round him. “The half-hour immediately preceding dinner is usually the heaviest period of the day, but *noos avong shongshay toot cela*. How the possession of a French cook does brush up one’s French, to be sure! One seems to be, as it were, absorbing the language into one’s very system. It is certainly a delightful way of acquiring a foreign tongue, and is immeasurably superior to Ollendorf’s method after this manner: ‘Do you love the white hat of the virtuous chimney-sweeper? *Answer*: No; because my fine grandmother has eaten the green parasol of the magnanimous cabinet-maker.’ That was the style of thing I used to hear you at with your governess, eh, Florry?”

“Yes, papa dear.”

“We spend this half-hour very pleasantly together in the calm joys of anticipation, don’t we, little Florry?” said Mr. Buddlecombe, as he playfully chucked his daughter under the chin, and then took his seat in an arm-chair.

“Yes, papa dear,” acquiesced Florence ; adding aside, as she seated herself on a low stool by her father’s chair, “To *me* this half-hour to-night will be the most trying I have ever passed.”

“I have considerably enhanced the pleasures of the evening by abstaining from lunch lately,” chuckled Mr. Buddlecombe ; “for, as the poet sweetly observes, ‘Abstinence makes the heart grow fonder’” (patting the lower portion of his waistcoat) —“fond foolish heart !”

“*Absence*, papa dear, the poet said ; not *abstinence*,” remarked Florence.

"Well, darling, it's all the same," said Mr. Buddlecombe, patting his daughter's golden head with a tender playfulness. "By absence he of course meant absence from a meal; and what is that but abstinence? Ah, Florry, Florry, you matter-of-fact little puss, you've no soul for poetry."

"O, how I wish papa would look at Algy in the light of a *pâté de foie gras* or a Périgord pie!" sighed Florence, as she turned to the table for the *menu*.

"Now, Florry," said Mr. Buddlecombe, leaning back in his chair, crossing his legs, and bringing the tips of his fingers together, "commence, my dear. And, Florry, read, you know, as they say in your music-books, *con espressione*, *con MOLTO espressione*, my child."

"What a dreadful old *gourmand* this French cook is turning papa into!" mur-

mured Florence behind the *menu*. "His voice is actually trembling with emotion, and he's turning his eyes up as if he were saying his prayers!"

"Go on, Florence, and pay great attention to your elocution, my dear."

"*Potages*," began Florence, in resigned tones.

"Stop, Florry. There should be no extraneous distractions. In my deep and very natural interest I have unwittingly sat on my bunch of keys. There, that's all right. Proceed, my child."

And Mr. Buddlecombe composed himself to listen with a rapt expression of countenance.

"*Potages*."

"*Potages*," softly echoed Mr. Buddlecombe.

"*Tortue claire*."

"*Tortoo claire*: Clear turtle. Very good."

"And *consommé de volaille aux quenelles.*"

"*Congsomay de*—I say, Florry, that's a stumper. What does it mean?"

"I don't know exactly, papa dear."

"Neither do I. It will be a pleasant surprise, no doubt. It sounds delicious."

"*Poissons.*"

"*Poisson*: Fish. Good."

"*Turbôt, sauce Hollandaise; saumon racolé à la Tartare.*"

"Aha, that's the Tartar I like catching," gently interpolated Mr. Buddlecombe, with a soft smile.

"*Entrées.*"

"*Ongtray*: Come in. Come in, by all means," said Mr. Buddlecombe, with a playful and peculiar significance, as he tapped a waistcoat button.

"*Suprême de volaille aux truffes; filets*

de pigeons de Bordeaux; purée aux champignons."

"Read that again, Florry," said Mr. Buddlecombe, in tones of gentle ecstasy; "*ongcore, oncore*, my sweet child. It falls softly and soothingly on the ear like evening bells—dinner-bells."

Resignedly Florence acceded to the *encore*.

"What a b-e-a-utiful language French is! it appeals so to the heart," said Mr. Buddlecombe, again laying his hand tenderly on the lower portion of his waistcoat. "Proceed, little blue-eyed sweetener of my existence."

"Tête de Veau au Maire de Puddleton——"

"Stop a moment, darling! That claims a few words of acknowledgment from me. Now really, *could* there be a more delicate compliment conveyed with a more delicious

delicacy than that?" murmured Mr. Buddlecombe, his countenance luminous under this adroit touch of French polish. "Most truly is a Frenchman one of nature's noblemen. Go on, little golden-locks.'

"*Côtelettes de mouton à l'Anglaise*—well, I suppose in plain language that's mutton-chops," said Florence.

"Silence, carrot-head!" ejaculated Mr. Buddlecombe, starting as if something sharper than a serpent's tooth had bitten him. "Of all coarse brutes a Frenchman is the worst. He goes the whole *cochon*, and no mistake."

"O, of course, I recollect the romantic episode of the mutton-chops and the mastiff," muttered Florence *sotto voce*, as she turned away her head to conceal a smile.

"Ring the bell, Florence," said Mr. Buddlecome; adding aside, "I must take

something to wash down that disagreeable reminiscence."

Florence rose, rang the bell, and resumed her seat.

"I did think," said Mr. Buddlecombe, tapping the carpet furiously with one foot, "I *did* think that when I had a French cook I should not have such things as mutton-chops for dinner. Or if such an abomination as a mutton-chop *were* presented at my table, it would have been so disguised that its own sheep would not have known it. But *à l'Onglay* evidently means the article in all its normal repulsiveness of gristle and fat. O, you know, the fellow ought to have his salary cut down to that of a major-general, or whatever those old cut-throats in cocked hats call themselves."

At this point the obsequious Spigot entered the room in response to Florence's summons.

“Spigot, sherry and bitters. And *do* look sharp ; that is, if your natural cast of countenance does not render that an impossibility,” said Mr. Buddlecombe.

“Certainly, your worship,” said Spigot, hastily withdrawing.

“Good gracious !” thought Florence, with a fearful sinking at heart ; “if such a trifle puts him out in this way, what will he do, O what *will* he do when the announcement, which may be made at any moment, that an officer from the barracks is actually in the house, breaks rudely in upon his dreams of *tortue claire* and *volaille aux truffes* ?”

Fortunately—for the present at all events—the oil—in the shape of sherry and bitters—which was to be poured on the troubled waters of Mr. Buddlecombe’s soul speedily arrived ; and with the first sip he became not only calm, but even placid.

"Well, well," he remarked, without the least signs of the recent passion, which had come and passed with the suddenness of a Mediterranean squall, "there is no rose without a thorn, and no *maynoo*, I suppose, without a bitter pill. Now go on, Florry; *con molto espressione*, don't forget that, my child."

"Relevés: Chapons rôtis au Périgord."

"Good again. Capons roasted as they do them at Périgord. By the way, Périgord is a town in France, is it not? You learned geography last, Florry."

"Yes, papa, a town in the east of France, I think; famed for the manufacture of raised pies."

"Yes, yes, yes, to be sure. Raised pies! what an elevated form of industry! Dear me, what a graceful little interchange of civic compliments, what a delicate

method of cementing the *ongtongte cordial*, it would be if the Mayors of Périgord and Puddleton were to present each other with specimens of the native industries of their respective towns ! I'm sure I would give him as many Puddleton buttons as he liked in exchange for an equal number of Périgord pies. I'll think over the matter. Go on, little sunbeam dancing in rays of gilded light on the sere and yellow leaf of my old age. There is a something in the hour favourable to the spirit of poetry."

"Hanche de venaison aux——"

"Hush, Florence. You read that over a *leetle* too hurriedly—I might almost say irreverently. We have now arrived, so to speak, at the very zenith of the cook's efforts, and we should not treat the same in a spirit of levity. *This* is the way——"

Here the Mayor extended his hand ready for emphasis, turned up his eyes, cleared his throat, and was just on the point of showing his daughter how to render rhetorical justice to "the very zenith of the cook's efforts," when Spigot entered the room, and threw the following metaphorical bomb-shell at his worship's feet :

"A gentleman wants to see your worship immediately on a pressing matter of business."

"Heavens !" mentally ejaculated Florence, as she dropped the tiresome bill of fare, and clasped her hands ; "this must be Algy ! Madness !"

"Wants to see me at this hour ?" said Mr. Buddlecombe furiously. "Didn't you tell him I was engaged, Spigot ?"

"I did, your worship ; but he wouldn't go," replied Spigot, glancing in astonish-

ment at his young mistress, and wondering what on earth Miss Florence was tearing her pretty little lace handkerchief to pieces for.

“Wouldn’t go !” said Mr. Buddlecombe. “And I do wish to goodness, Spigot, that *you* wouldn’t go rolling about your eyes in that way. Keep those ocular demonstrations till you’ve got a fit yourself, or want to frighten an old woman into one.”

“Certainly, your worship,” replied the meek Spigot, fixing his master with a winkless glare until his eyes watered.

“Who is it?” asked Mr. Buddlecombe. “Who dares to come at this hour when—— Don’t stare like a stuck pig, Spigot !”

“Certainly not, your worship. I—I—I think, if you please, your worship, it’s—it’s—it’s—a—a—”

“Do *not* stammer, Spigot. There are few things more irritating to a listener than stammering; and irritation just before a meal is to be specially avoided. It plays the deuce with the gastric juices. Who is it?”

“Well, your most worshipful worship,” faltered Spigot, surreptitiously laying hold of the door-handle behind him as a first step to a hasty retreat should circumstances necessitate one, “it’s a gent from the barracks, your worship.”

“An individual from the barracks! want to see *me*!” exclaimed Mr. Buddlecombe, jumping up; while Florence, trembling from head to foot, seized a book, opened it upside down, and pretended to be absorbed in its contents.

“Such is his outrageous request, your worship. Here’s his card.”

“Why didn’t you give it to me before?”

said Mr. Buddlecombe, snatching the small piece of pasteboard.

“Well, knowing your worship’s dislike to the military, I thought it best not to be too sudden in the announcement, your worship,” explained Spigot, while his master adjusted his glasses.

“ ‘Mr. Algernon Fitzmaurice Warriner, the Queen’s Own Fusiliers,’ ” said Mr. Buddlecombe, reading the superscription on the card, which he held at arm’s length and surveyed with upturned nose, as if it were something noxious and nasty. “Now what, in the name of wonder, can Mr. Algernon Fitzmaurice Warriner, of the Queen’s Own Slaughterers, or whatever they call themselves, want with me? What, in the wildest flights of the human fancy, can Mr. Algernon Fitzmaurice Warriner of the Queen’s Own Brain-spat-terers, and the worshipful Mayor of

Puddleton, be supposed to have in common?"

"I can see papa is working himself up into one of his paroxysms of rage," murmured the pale trembling little Florence, as, with her head still bent over the reversed book, she anxiously gazed through her long lashes at her excitable parent. "With his violent temper there may be murder. I'll remove everything that might offer itself to his hand as a weapon."

And in this very merciful spirit of precaution Florence, watching her opportunities, succeeded in pocketing, one after another, such deadly engines of carnage as a paper-knife, a pair of scissors, and a bodkin.

"How *can* people be so reckless as to leave such things about!" whimpered Florence, as she pounced on the last, and

pocketed it as if it had been what bodkins used to be in Shakespeare's time, a dagger with which any one tired of life "might his quietus make," or any other man's. "It's positively murder made easy."

While Florence's hands were thus busily engaged, Mr. Buddlecombe's tongue was not idle.

"I call this invasion of my privacy an outrage, a brutal outrage. Is he sober, Spigot?"

"Well, as sober, your worship, as can be expected from the military. Leastways he conducts hisself with tolerable propriety, considering."

"I'm astonished at it. Is he in his senses, then?"

"Well, in as much as he's got, your worship, I should imagine."

"Gracious!" mentally ejaculated Florence, with a shudder, "there's the poker,

papa's favourite weapon, I should think ! I *must* have it. I daresay I'll be able to get hold of it and hide it while papa is engaged with that cringing old sycophant."

"Where did you leave him, Spigot?" asked Mr. Buddlecombe.

"Well, knowing your worship's very proper antipathy to the military, I left him on the doorstep, your worship."

"Old wretch !" muttered Florence, with a contemptuous glance at Spigot, as she sidled towards the fender.

"And a very proper place too, Spigot. And did you shut the door?"

"I did, your worship."

"In his face?"

"*Right* in his face, your worship."

"With a bang?"

"With a most fearful bang, your worship."

“Spigot, you may have your faults, but I must say there *are* occasions when you evince a great deal of delicate tact, and this is pre-eminently one of them. I do not say that if you had kicked him down the steps you would not have exhibited in a still higher degree your command of that rare and ethereal attribute ; but we cannot expect—— Florence, what *are* you trying to do with that poker ?”

For a moment or two poor Florence was completely scared, and stood, mute and motionless, with the article in question behind her back, where she had whisked it just too late to evade her parent’s vision.

“O, it’s—it’s—it’s such a pretty poker, pa,” she at last stammered out, with all the futile desperation of a drowning man clutching at a straw. “I was thinking it would make such a—such a sweet ornament

for my *châteline*. Will you"—and here she placed her hands on his shoulders and looked coaxingly up into his face—"will you give it to me, papa dear?"

A strange unnatural calm, such as sudden and extreme bewilderment occasionally produces even on the most excitable temperaments, came over Mr. Buddlecombe.

"Does history furnish any records of insane mayors?" he gloomily asked, while Florence, with the poker still clasped in her hand, continued to hang on to his shoulders. "Or is it reserved for me to figure as the first on that mournful list? I wonder, if I go mad during my mayoralty, whether they'll present me with a silver straitjacket? Here's my only child, on whose education no expense has been spared, and who has hitherto betrayed no marked symptoms of idiocy nor any special mania for fire-irons, beseeching me in

tender and imploring accents to 'give her the pretty poker, pa;' while simultaneously a member of the windpipe-slitting brain-spattering profession called the army drops in at the sacred hour of dinner, just for all the world as if I were dotingly fond of the species. It's really enough—— Here, get away with you! Put that poker down at once, Florence, and go up to your mother! Do you hear me? Put that poker in its right place, miss. Well, if you won't, I will."

Snatching the poker from Florence, who at once began to cry, Mr. Buddlecombe excitedly threw it into the half-open drawer of the library-table, near which he was standing.

"There," said he, as he closed the drawer with a bang, "I'm the only one in the whole house who has got a head in an

emergency, and keeps cool and collected. Go to your mother, Florence."

"I can't leave them alone together," sobbed Florence, as she moved towards the door, pouring her muffled plaint into a diminutive bundle of rags which ten minutes before had been a dainty little lace handkerchief. "I'll go out, and then slip back behind that screen; and if Algy *does* come in, and papa makes a murderous onslaught upon him with the poker, I'll rush between them and receive the death-blow on my own head."

This last beautiful sentiment was nearly choked with sobs.

"So glad I took the *other* things away, though," she added, brightening up a little as she put her hand in her pocket, and felt the paper-knife, the pair of scissors, and the bodkin.

"It's impossible this individual can have

any business with me," said Mr. Buddlecombe, as soon as the door had closed on Florence.

"Quite, your worship," said Spigot, whose anxiety to tell his master that he had put the poker into the table-drawer was restrained by a dread amounting almost to a certainty that he, the informant, would have it thrown at his head for his pains if he did so.

"It is some impertinent attempt at a vulgar practical joke. I sha'n't see him. Tell him to go about his business—that's to say if a military man *has* business anywhere."

"Yes, your worship."

"Here, take back his card. Say I don't want it. Now where the deuce did I put it? I must have dropped it in this drawer; I recollect it was open. He may keep—— Now *do* look where Florence has put that

poker; in the drawer, actually, of my writing-table, amongst all my papers! Could anyone believe that a girl on whose education no expense has been spared could be so giddy? Confound the poker, and the card too! Here, tell the individual on the doorstep to go away."

"Yes, your worship," said Spigot, retiring.

"Here, Spigot."

"Your worship."

"You may put it rather stronger than that. Tell him to go to the ——. You understand, Spigot."

"Perfectly, your worship."

"Stay a moment, Spigot. You are an old and faithful retainer of the family."

"I am indeed, your worship."

"At an early age, when a factory boy, you narrowly escaped being worked up

into buttons, through being caught in the machinery."

"Had I been, your worship, I trust that as buttons I should not have disgraced the firm."

The Mayor of Puddleton was visibly touched.

"And I do further trust, your worship, that I should not have been military buttons, nor had any device or motto of a warlike nature stamped upon me."

"O, do you know," said the Mayor, quite carried away by this last, "a person capable of such beautiful sentiments, no matter how far-fetched, must not be sacrificed to military brutality. No, Spigot, I shall not expose you to the risk of delivering that message. It would probably lead to your being knocked down and trampled upon."

"I should be proud of falling in your worship's service."

"No, I prefer your standing up for me. Tell this individual to go away, and that if he *has* any business with me he can communicate it by letter to my office to-morrow morning. And further, impress upon him the utter hopelessness of any attempt on his part to obtain even a *transient* view of me this evening, much less an *interview*."


"Very good, your worship."

Sporting reader, I here pause at the conclusion of this chapter to ask you, in the language of the betting-ring, what odds you are prepared to lay against the successful termination of Algernon Warriner's design of dining this very evening with the Mayor of Puddleton, by that civic worthy's own invitation?



CHAPTER III.

CONFLICTING EMOTIONS.

“ DO you know, one's digestive organs are completely upset by this affair,” testily remarked the Mayor as Spigot withdrew, adding, in a querulous whine, “I haven't half the appetite I had. I'll try and coax it back.”

With this object in view, Mr. Buddlecombe, reseated himself in his armchair, adjusted his double glasses, took up the *menu*, and addressed himself to the perusal of that entrancing schedule. The effect was apparently most soothing. With the

first anticipatory spoonful of the *tortue claire*, grim-visaged war smoothed its wrinkled front, and his brow became as clear as the turtle; and when in fancy he partook of the *saumon*, it might be, but *he* was not, *à la Tartare*. There was nothing of the fierce Tartar nature about him then.

While he was thus absorbed, the door was noiselessly opened, and, with a mouse-like footfall, Florence entered and ensconced herself behind a large screen, whose duty was to shield the Mayor of Puddleton from the public gaze when he condescended to be mortal, and wished to wash his hands without the trouble of going upstairs. Of course this clandestine proceeding was the first step towards the fulfilment of Florence's expressed intention of receiving the death-blow on her own devoted little head, should her father make a murderous

onslaught with his favourite weapon the poker, on the gallant but rash Algernon Warriner.

Florence had only just settled herself in her hiding-place, and Mr. Buddlecombe's spirit had once more gloriously soared to the "zenith of the cook's efforts," *alias* the haunch of venison, when the door was again opened, and Spigot entered with the demeanour of a criminal on his way to the scaffold.

"If you please, your worship, it's not my fault, your most worshipful worship," faltered Spigot.

"What's not your fault?" asked Mr. Buddlecombe, with the deepest anxiety; "has anything happened to the dinner?"

"O no, nothing quite so fearfully awful as that, your worship."

The Mayor breathed again.

"I really thought," he murmured, with

that fluttering of spirit, half painful, half joyous, which generally betokens the only half-realised immunity from some suddenly threatened calamity, "that the cook had had a fit, just at the critical moment when the *congsonay* or the *sooprane de volatile* most needed his delicate attention."

"It's the young officer, your worship."

The Mayor started, and in spirit, if not in word, he went as near an oath as a mayor's pure spirit can go.

"He's the most impertinacious creature I ever came across, your worship. He says he particularly wants to see your worship."

"Does he? Well, well, perhaps it is pardonable on his part. Tell him I occasionally drive through the main street on my way to the court-house, and if he takes up a position on the pavement—but he mustn't

climb a lamp-post, tell him, or a water-spout; I won't have anything of that sort—and remains there long enough, he will ultimately enjoy the privilege of looking at me as I drive past. A cat may look at a king, and, I suppose, a soldier may look at a mayor. At all events, I shan't offer any objection. It may do him good, and it can't do me any harm. For, although he belongs to a murderous trade, I don't suppose there is any of the basilisk or the Gorgon in his eye."

"But he says he must see your worship here in your own residence, this very evening, your worship."

"*Must* see me!" burst forth the Mayor. "Well, upon my word, that's rich! Tell him if he *must* see me in my own residence this very evening, he may apply his eye to the bottom of the street-door, and, if the door-mat doesn't interfere with his

vision, he may feast his eyes on my evening pumps, which will be just about all he'll catch of me, as I walk across the hall to the dining-room."

"He, he, he, he!" laughed Spigot for about fifteen seconds, with the regularity of a clock ticking; for Mr. Buddlecombe, who evidently thought this sally rather smart, had given him a glance which unmistakably conveyed the mandate, "Be tickled."

When people are very angry there is nothing so soothing, just for a passing moment, as the consciousness of having said a smart, or what they consider a smart, thing at the expense of the person who has provoked their wrath. Mr. Buddlecombe almost smiled. Spigot was encouraged.

"He's a civil-spoken young gentleman, your worship," he pleaded, as he instinc-

tively placed his finger and thumb into his waistcoat-pocket, and tenderly manipulated a sovereign which had recently found its way there, "a very civil-spoken young gent, and his manners lead one to believe he's moved in polite circles. He begs your worship will be good enough to read this letter."

"O, all this abominable annoyance will utterly ruin my zest for dinner!" growled Mr. Buddlecombe, as he snatched the letter. "I'll take his letter, but tell him I shall not see him to-night, and not to call here again. My clerk will answer it, if it requires an answer."

"Very good, your worship."

And Spigot withdrew, only too glad to have earned his sovereign so easily; for, though he did not approve of soldiers, he was sufficiently a political economist to know that their money was as good as any

other people's. He need not have read Adam Smith or John Stuart Mill to have mastered that fact.

"Now I dare say," said the Mayor, holding the letter at arm's length and looking suspiciously on it, "that there's a cracker or a squib inside, warranted to blow the opener's eyes out. That's the military idea of a joke. I wonder whether Bolitho would see if it were played upon *him*. I wish they'd try. I'd stand the cracker—the best money could procure—if there was any difficulty on the score of expense. I am only astonished," he continued, as he drew forth his 'double glasses and adjusted them, "that I have not received before this a box containing a choice assortment of door-knockers. That, I believe, is the usually military offering to the mayor of a town. Or woke up some morning and found the sign of the Red

Lion over my portico. Another military *jew de spree*. Or a fine young donkey in my bed, alive and kicking, with Georgina's nightcap on ! That is, I believe, the very *cream de la cream* of military *espiegleree*."

By this time the glasses had been properly adjusted, and the envelope opened.

"Hallo ! what's this ?" exclaimed Mr. Buddlecombe, as, at the very first glance, his eye caught that magic little symbol £, with a good long tail after it. "Confound that Spigot, running off in such a hurry !"

The bell was rung violently, and in a very few moments Spigot reappeared.

"Don't be in such a hurry, Spigot. This overdone assumption of nimbleness at your time of life is unnatural, not to say ghastly."

"It is indeed, your worship," said Spigot humbly, and out of breath.

"Wait outside until I call you in. I may have some message to deliver to this individual."

The mandate was of course obeyed.

"Now what *can* this person have to say to me on money matters? At all events, I'll do him the honour of reading his letter.

" 'SIR,

" 'Knowing the unfortunate, and on my part deeply deplored, prejudice you entertain towards my profession, I apprehend some difficulty in obtaining an interview with you. I have, therefore, taken the precaution of providing myself with this letter in the event of your refusing in the first instance to see me. The importance of my errand will, I hope, justify

what must seem to you an unwarrantable intrusion. It is in my power, sir, to save you no less a sum than £30,000 ; and how this can be done I am ready to communicate to you at once, if you will only afford me an opportunity of doing so in private.

“ ‘ I remain, sir,

“ ‘ Your obedient servant,

“ ‘ A. F. WARRINER.’ ”

“ Well, a more extraordinary epistle I never read ! I do not know whether I should treat it with utter contempt, or afford this person the opportunity he solicits in, I am bound to admit, straightforward and yet respectful terms. It is quite within the bounds of possibility that he has, through relatives or friends, become possessed of certain information regarding some movements in the money market,

which may affect me to a considerable extent ; and being anxious to curry favour with a personage in my exalted position— Anyhow, I'll take a little time to consider what course I shall pursue. In the meantime, however, he may get tired of the doorstep. Spigot !”

“Your worship,” said Spigot, promptly reappearing.

“I may or may not see this gentleman. Request him to wait a little ; and in the meantime you may promote him from the doorstep to the library. I'll ring when I want you.”

“Very good, your worship.”

“I think I'll see him,” soliloquised the Mayor, as Spigot closed the door. “If it's an outrageous attempt at a hoax, I flatter myself there's enough inborn dignity about me which, with the divinity hedging my office, will cause the attempt to recoil

on the offender's own head. But I'm talking nonsense. He would never dare to think of such a thing. Preposterous! I'll see him."

Mr. Buddlecombé was just on the point of ringing the bell, when his hand was stayed by a horrible misgiving which then coursed through his brain, gathering strength step by step. "I am, and have been for a considerable time, a public character, and of course a fierce light has beaten upon many of my actions. When member for Puddleton, I opposed every measure brought forward for the benefit of the army, on the grounds that there should be no army at all. I dare say I have made myself obnoxious to the military. I shouldn't wonder if I've been burnt in effigy on numerous barrack-squares. My efforts may have retarded promotion or something of that kind, and this—this—"

(here these thick-coming fancies assumed a most horrible shape, and his spirit faltered) "this visit may be prompted by motives of revenge. History repeats itself. Was not the Duke of Buckingham assassinated at Portsmouth by an officer of the army who considered his professional prospects had been blasted by that ill-fated nobleman's policy? Portsmouth begins with a P ; so does Puddleton ! Buckingham with a B ; so does Buddlecombe ! Gracious ! I may be on the eve of assassination !"

Having arrived at this ghastly conclusion, Mr. Buddlecombe was seized with a panic, in which he was very nearly opening the window and invoking external aid. A few moments' consideration, however, induced a more dignified state of mind, and he was about to content himself with ringing the bell and directing his visitor to be shown out,

when another glance at the letter made him hesitate.

“An enormous sum! Quite a fortune! What can it mean?”

Finally greed and curiosity together settled the question, and Mr. Buddlecombe summoned Spigot.

“Spigot, show the windpipe-slitter in.”

“Who, your worship?”

“The professional brain-spatterer.”

“I beg your most worshipful worship’s worshipful pardon, but I don’t quite——”

“You never *do* quite. The military individual, of course. That’s the same thing, isn’t it?”

“Certainly, your worship; *exactly* the same thing.”

“And look here, Spigot: intimate to him in the plainest of terms that I have only a very few minutes to spare. The dinner can be served when ready, and you

can ring the dinner-bell with more than usual emphasis ; and if that has no effect you had better come in at intervals of two minutes to remind me that the dinner's waiting."

"Your wishes shall be scrupulously attended to, your worship."

"I should think that would be a sufficient hint even to the most pachydermatous of military coxcombs," soliloquised Mr. Buddlecombe, as Spigot departed on his errand. "I feel I am quite right in granting this interview. Never throw away a chance, has ever been my motto and the keystone of my success in life."

Here the door was opened, and Algernon Warriner was shown in by Spigot. Notwithstanding the indignity he had been subjected to, of being kept waiting for fully ten minutes on the doorstep, there was not the slightest evidence of chagrin or impa-

tience about Warriner. He was dressed in evening clothes, and wore an overcoat, one sleeve of which hung down by his side empty. Many months before, in the Crimea, a fragment of shell had struck him on the right fore-arm, splintering both bones; and it was solely to that glorious combination of youth, pluck, and a good constitution, that he owed the preservation of the limb. The wound might have healed ere this, but Algernon Warriner, as brave a youngster as ever wore the British uniform, had insisted on coming off the sick-list, and taking his turn of duty in the deadly trenches long before he was fit to do so.

Many men who have been cool under an enemy's fire have found that "interview with papa in the study" rather too much for their firm nerves. But young Warriner, as well as being dauntless in war,

was daring in love, and, though his demeanour was courtesy itself, there was an unmistakable air of self-possession about him. There was one heart, however, in the room, which was beating hard enough for his and itself as well, and that was Florence's, as she crouched behind the screen. Had Warriner been conscious of what was on the *other* side of the screen, *his* heart, too, might have accelerated its movement a little.

"I must apologise for intruding at such an unseasonable hour," he said, with a polite bow.

"Never mind apologies, sir," said Mr. Buddlecombe, stiffly returning the salutation, and fussily motioning his visitor to a seat.

"As you may have gathered from my card," continued Warriner, after seating himself, "I am quartered here."

“And you might be hanged and drawn as well—here or anywhere else—for all I’d care,” growled Mr. Buddlecombe to himself, as he hurriedly passed his hand down his face, a trick very common with irritable people.

“As an inhabitant, therefore, of Puddleton—though only a temporary one—I may say I possess some slight grounds of introduction to Puddleton’s chief magistrate; for, as I dare say you are aware, sir, an Englishman by becoming a soldier, does not forfeit his rights as a citizen.”

“Really, sir,” said Mr. Buddlecombe, as he beat a tattoo, *prestissimo*, with the fingers of his right hand on the table beside him, ‘I have a very few moments to spare, and as a saving of time we will dispense with apologies and all other preambles. I have read your letter, and now, sir, I await

your explanation of its extraordinary contents."

"To give you that explanation, sir, is of course the object of my visit," returned Warriner, with great deliberation, but also extreme politeness. "The statement contained in my letter no doubt caused you some surprise. Am I not right in supposing so, sir?"

"I have already implied that it did, and still does, sir. Pray proceed a little quicker, sir."

Warriner bowed with the greatest courtesy, as if intimating that Mr. Buddlecombe's wishes on this score should be sacredly observed, and proceeded, with rather more deliberation than before :

"It may also have awakened in your mind, and most naturally so, I am bound to admit, some doubt as to whether I could

carry out what I have professed myself able to do."

"It did, sir. But I have given you the benefit of the doubt and granted you a hearing. Pray now give *me* the benefit of a little more expedition. My time is precious, sir."

Here, most opportunely, Mr. Spigot's campanological performance, conducted according to his instructions "with more than usual emphasis," filled the whole house from basement to roof with a metallic clamour; and Mr. Buddlecombe was evidently deeply moved as he listened to

"That all-softening, overpowering knell,
The tocsin of the soul—the dinner-bell."

"Hooray!" mentally ejaculated Wariner. "The first outwork is carried!"

"Very precious indeed, sir," repeated Mr. Buddlecombe, with considerable feeling,

as the brazen clangour died away ; adding, in the silent depths of his heart, “ Why, the clear turtle will be congealing in its receptive tureen, and he hasn’t even opened his case.”

“ Pray excuse my presence at such an inopportune time, sir,” resumed the polite but terribly prolix visitor. “ The importance of the business on hand will, I feel sure, plead in my behalf, especially when I add my own expressions of regret that circumstances should have forced me into obtruding myself——”

“ I’ve told you before, sir,” interrupted Mr. Buddlecombe, with a warmth of tone that brought Florence’s little face peeping round the edge of the screen, with considerable alarm portrayed in it, “ I have told you before, sir, that apologies are only a waste of time. Now to the point. You say it is in your power to save me a very

large sum of money. Out with it, sir, without any further beating about the bush."

"Knowing how much more experience you must possess than I do, sir, in monetary as well as in most other mundane matters, and also having in view the difference in our ages, I feel it is the height of presumption on my part——"

"O dear, O dear! I wonder what the *congsomay* is *congsomaying* itself into!" muttered Mr. Buddlecombe, with a stifled groan, as he rose from his chair and took a turn up and down the room.

"—to remind you of the trite old proverb, 'More haste, less speed.' This is true in most——"

"Mr. Bolitho and Mrs. Buddlecombe are in the drawing-room, your worship, and the dinner's waiting," said Spigot, throwing open the door and speaking as impressively as he could.

"That's capital ; he can't stand the strain much longer," mentally remarked Warriner, with an internal chuckle.

"There, sir, do you hear that?" said Mr. Buddlecombe, as Spigot closed the door and retired. "I'll really trouble you for a little more *saumon à la Tar*—— Dear, dear, I mean a little more expedition, sir. Surely you are not so morally blind as to wilfully keep a gentleman from his dinner."

"Certainly not, sir," replied Warriner, again courteously inclining his head, and speaking in more measured tones than ever. "But still you will forgive me, I am sure, if I hint that, weighed with the importance of my business, a dinner should be as mere dust in the balance."

"Nothing of the sort, sir," snapped Mr. Buddlecombe, wheeling fiercely round on his visitor. "I don't agree with you, sir ;"

and turning on his heel, he muttered with indignation, "He's, never seen *me* eat a dinner, or he wouldn't go calling it mere dust in the balance, the long-winded young puppy!"

"Well, sir, we will at once proceed to business, then. Will you allow me to consult my note-book for a few moments?"

In reply to this unreasonable and unseasonable request, Mr. Buddlecombe could only wave his hand and give vent to a nondescript noise which may or may not have been the permission solicited. Anyhow, Warriner interpreted it in the former sense; and while he was apparently absorbed in his notes, Mr. Buddlecombe paced up and down the room, venting his sorrow, his indignation, and his impatience in the following disjointed mutterings:

3 "Sooprane de volatile aux troofuls ruined! Filets de pigeon done to rags!

Chapong rôtée au Périgord must be rapidly becoming *chapong rôtée au* kitchen cinder. I shall have a sort of rag and cinder banquet."

Here Spigot appeared, and piled up the agony still higher with :

"The French cook, your worship, says the sight of his dinner spoiling before his very eye is getting too much for his feelings."

"O, flesh and blood can stand this no longer!" said the Mayor, in a desperate aside; adding aloud, "There, sir, you hear that. You've been quite long enough consulting your note-book. I can't waste another moment over preliminaries. State your case at once."

"What a lot of playing the old gentleman takes! A salmon is a joke to him," thought Warriner. "Ten thousand pardons," he pleaded, with another of his

extremely polite bows. "Believe me, I feel the delicacy of my position most acutely, and I must really beg to be allowed once more to tender my sincerest apol——"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Buddlecombe, wildly, "politeness is all very well—I myself always carry it to an absurd extreme; but we have had enough of it on this occasion, sir. I'm sick of it. For goodness' sake let's have a little plain speaking now."

"Certainly, sir, I quite admit the justice of your remarks; and you, on your side, will, I am sure, enter into my feelings of embarrassment——"

"No, sir, I can't do anything of the sort."

"Pray, sir, do not hurry me; it is a subject involving so much——"

"Waste of time, sir!" roared Mr. Buddle-

combe, now losing all control over himself. "O, I see through all this delay and shilly-shallying. It is merely the vain expedient to gain time on the part of a—a—of an impostor, sir, an impostor!"

Here Mr. Buddlecombe, red in the face with passion, snapped his fingers at Warriner and pointed indignantly to the door.

"There, sir, there's your way. Be off with you!"

The imperturbable Warriner rose slowly from his seat, bowed low, and moved towards the door. On reaching it, he turned round and quietly said:

"It is in sorrow, sir, rather than in anger or indignation, that I repudiate the charge of imposition. If you cannot enter into *my* feelings, I can into *yours*, knowing as I do how strong appearances must be against me. But I can only reiterate, on

my word of honour"—this solemnly placing his hand on his heart—"that the matter I had to lay before you would have involved a saving to you of the large sum I mentioned in my letter."

"The dinner will be utterly spoiled, your worship," said Spigot, putting his head in at the door.

Mr. Buddlecombe manifested great emotion; and Warriner continued, in that style of periphrastic politeness which he had adopted all through the interview, for the purpose of spinning out the time:

"I feel that I have already transgressed the limits of politeness beyond all rules of etiquette. Good-evening, sir."

Poor Mr. Buddlecombe, torn by conflicting emotions, was a pitiable spectacle.

"Good-eve—stay, sir, don't—dear me—utterly spoiled! Thirty thousand *filets de pigeons* sterling. I can't see any way out

of the difficulty. O dear, O dear! Hang it, sir! give me the pleasure of your company at dinner, and you can impart this piece of information in your own way afterwards."

"Delighted," said Warriner, pleasantly. "Since you're so pressing, I shall have much pleasure."

"Humph," grunted Mr. Buddlecombe aside, "'since you're so pressing,' as the paving-stone remarked to the steam-roller. Spigot!"

"Your worship," said Spigot, promptly reappearing from outside.

"Relieve this gentleman of his hat and coat; and, Spigot, lay another place at the table; he will dine here."

As Mr. Buddlecombe made this last communication, the situations between master and man were, for the first time in their respective lives, reversed. Spigot

fairly stared his master out of countenance, and Mr. Buddlecombe dared not meet the searching gaze of his servant.

“I beg your worship’s pardon,” at last stammered Spigot; “but I don’t think I quite heard what your worship was pleased to say.”

“He will dine here; take his hat and coat,” sharply repeated Mr. Buddlecombe.

Like one in a dream, Spigot obeyed the behest; and then, with a sort of savage politeness, Mr. Buddlecombe bowed his guest out of the room and followed.

As soon as the coast was clear, Florence emerged from behind the screen.

“O, Algy, Algy!” she exclaimed, clapping her hands and laughing merrily, “you clever darling! I love you more than ever now, for your tact and coolness. But what *can* this scheme be? Algy has given his word of honour, so of course

there *must* be something. O, poor darling old papa ! Now I must run up, and then go into the drawing-room as if I had just come down from my room."

PART III.

NONE BUT THE BRAVE DESERVE THE FAIR.





CHAPTER I.

A TERRIBLE EXPLOSION.



SHALL not ask you, reader, to Mr. Buddlecombe's dinner. In the first place, you have had, I should think, enough of it in anticipation. In the second, the action of the story is in abeyance throughout the whole of the dinner-scene. I will, therefore, leave to your lively imagination the astonishment of Mrs. Buddlecombe and old Bolitho when the Mayor ushered in Algernon Warriner, and resume the narrative at that point where Mr. Buddlecombe, eager

to hear the wonderful scheme and then get rid of his guest, hurried him back to the study soon after the ladies had left the table, much to the convivial old Bolitho's dissatisfaction."

"I was very pleased with the way in which Florence conducted herself," mentally remarked Mr. Buddlecombe, as he took his seat, after having motioned Warriner to a chair on the other side of the study-table. "There was an unmistakable air of utter indifference to this young man, which must have been inexpressibly galling to a conceited young military coxcomb. I'm on the tenter-hooks of expectation about this scheme."

"What a hurry the old boy is in!" simultaneously mused Warriner, as he took *his* seat. "I hadn't half punished that port of his. Florry looked lovelier than ever."

"Now, sir," said Mr. Buddlecombe, having settled himself comfortably, "I hope you will be good enough to divulge the object of your visit to me this evening with a little more expedition than you observed before dinner. Brevity, allow me to remind you, sir, is the soul of business as well as of wit."

"Certainly, sir. I am now in a better position to be brief than before partaking of your hospitality."

"That means," thought the Mayor, highly pleased at what he imagined was a covert allusion to his exalted position—"that means he was awed by my bearing before dinner, but that my port after dinner has given him courage. Now, sir," he added aloud, "I await your communication."

"I can state it to you in a very few words."

"So much the better," said Mr. Buddle-

combe, leaning forward in his chair, eagerly listening.

"I shall go straight to the point," said Warriner. "You have, sir——"

At this most interesting moment the door was boisterously flung open, and old Bolitho entered in a state of considerable hilarity.

"Bother! Bolitho's the plague of my life," growled Mr. Buddlecombe, striking his knee with his clenched fist.

"Here I am, you see," said old Bolitho, rather unnecessarily. "To make use of a nautical phrase, I slipped my cable and gave chase."

"To judge from his flushed countenance," snarled Mr. Buddlecombe aside, "I should say 'hard a-port' would be the nautical phrase to express what Bolitho's been up to."

"I guessed your little game all of a

sudden, Buddle, my boy," said the hearty but somewhat obtrusive old gentleman. "Ah, conquering hero," he added, turning his beaming and rubicund old countenance full on Warriner, "it has afforded me the keenest gratification to see you a guest of my old friend. Now that we are untrammelled by the presence of the ladies or the etiquette of the dinner-table, allow me to shake your hand once more. Are you quite sure now it doesn't hurt your wounded arm?"

"No, no; not in the least," said Warriner, with a careless laugh.

"Then what does he carry it in a sling for, if it's all right?" growled Mr. Buddlecombe aside.

"Ah, I heard all about it from your fellows," said old Bolitho, regarding the young soldier with a kindling eye, and still retaining his hand; "how you

wouldn't leave the ground, though you were badly hit."

"Nothing so very wonderful in that," muttered Mr. Buddlecombe, surveying the other two with a jaundiced eye. "*I* didn't leave the ground when I was badly hit in my memorable fight with Bolitho. In fact, I was particularly adhesive to the ground on finding myself at full length upon it."

This reminiscence of boyhood was strictly true; for Puddleton's Mayor in embryo was, on the occasion alluded to, perfectly aware of that clause in the pugilistic code forbidding active hostilities as long as one of the combatants occupies a recumbent position.

"Yes; and how you carried a message through a murderous fire from one brigadier to another after two aides-de-camp and an orderly officer had been killed or seriously wounded in the attempt," con-

tinued Mr. Bolitho, giving Warriner's hand another hearty wring.

"O nonsense, Mr. Bolitho!" said the young man, in a serio-comic vein. "These things don't bear talking about. A soldier's motto is 'Deeds, not words.'"

"Of course not words from those who have performed the deeds; but others may speak about them; ay, and speak too in trumpet-tongued tones!" said old Bolitho, finishing up with a roar, just to illustrate his meaning.

This blatant mode of celebrating valour had any but a soothing effect upon Mr. Buddlecombe. A loud voice invariably acts on excitable natures as a powerful irritant. Stentor could hardly have been the pleasantest companion to be found for a crusty old gentleman of ancient days.

"Bolitho," said Mr. Buddlecome, labouring to be dulcet-toned by way of a cutting

contrast, "do you know, looking at the world and its inhabitants from a Shakspearian point of view—the one as a stage and the other as mere players, it strikes me you've got a pretty easy part to play."

"So much the better, for I'm not much of an actor," was the hearty rejoinder, followed by a good-humoured laugh.

"Yes," continued Mr. Buddlecombe, "a very easy part; it's like the lion's in the 'most lamentable comedy of Pyramus and Thisbe.' 'You may do it extempore, for it's nothing but roaring.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed old Bolitho, immensely tickled.

"Confound it!" muttered Mr. Buddlecombe, dropping the dulcet tone, for it is a very annoying, not to say exasperating thing, after having carefully pointed your shaft and tipped it with a nice little piece

of ill-nature, to find, when you fire it point-blank into your intended victim, that it tickles pleasantly instead of smarting keenly. "Confound it, I have often heard that it takes a surgical operation to make a Scotchman see a joke ; but, hang me ! I don't believe all the surgical operations in the world would ever make Bolitho *feel* one."

During this muttered reflection its unconscious subject seated himself in a comfortable arm-chair, beamed pleasantly, rubbed his hands merrily, and altogether was evidently settling himself down for a cosy half-hour.

"Bolitho," said Mr. Buddlecombe, who was fretting and fuming to resume the *tête-à-tête* with Warriner, "as you don't appear to have anything important to communicate, I think it just as well to remind you that you are interrupting a

private conversation of a somewhat pressing nature."

"O, don't mind me," replied the irrepressible old gentleman. "Besides, *I* know quite well what you've got to say. You hadn't left me alone two minutes with the wine, Buddle, when the subject of your little private conversation occurred to me, and so I took the liberty——"

"Don't mention it," said Mr. Buddlecombe, catching his friend up short. "When you *don't* take a liberty, Bolitho, *then* the circumstance *may* be worth recording amongst the phenomena of the age. But when you *do* take a liberty, Bolitho—Why, as the French say, '*Cela va song dear!*'"

"Well, well," returned old Bolitho, rising from his seat, without the slightest symptom of chagrin, and smiting his captious old friend on the shoulder, "I

knew *I* should make no difference, for, Buddle, we were boys together."

"I know we were; but, Bolitho, it doesn't follow that we are, therefore, to be Siamese twins together," testily retorted Mr. Buddlecombe. "*Do* allow our respective paths of life to bifurcate occasionally. Oh, do you know," he muttered, as he took a turn towards the window, just by way of calming his excited feelings a little, "my advice to anyone beginning life is, Don't be a boy; at least, don't be a boy together with another boy, or you'll live to repent it all your days."

"Yes, I guessed what it was you wished to tell our mutual friend," said the pachydermatous old Bolitho, following Mr. Buddlecombe and speaking confidentially; that is to say, people in the adjoining villa might possibly have failed to catch the drift of his remarks; "you wanted to tell

him that a change had come o'er the spirit of your dream. You wanted to make the *amende honorable* in a neat little speech about retracting your previous bad opinion of his profession. By the living Jingo, Warriner, my boy, I was never so surprised in my life as when I saw you come into the drawing-room the guest of my old friend! Anyone might have knocked me down with a feather."

"What an opportunity I lost!" growled Mr. Buddlecombe. "I'd have expended the contents of my last pillow in the cause."

"I am sure," said Warriner, with excessive politeness, "that a profound sense of gratification would permeate through all ranks of the British army could they only know how they have risen in the estimation of the worshipful Mayor of Puddleton."

“Does he mean that now for impudence or not?” mentally reasoned Mr. Buddlecombe. “Impudence, I should think. I’ll confront impudence with dignity.”

With this intention Mr. Buddlecombe assumed an attitude much affected by old gentlemen when standing on their dignity—that is to say, he pulled up his shirt-collar with one hand, placed the thumb of the other in the nearer arm-hole of his waistcoat, planted one foot at about right angles to the other, and then, after clearing his throat, commenced with overwhelming pomposity :

“Sir, the honour you confer——”

“Ha, ha, ha! fancy old Buddle a sort of military idol!” roared Mr. Bolitho, at the same time administering a poke in the ribs which curled up the dignified attitude with a completeness that brought knees and nose into pretty close proximity, be-

sides communicating a spasmodic movement of a "double-shuffle" nature to the feet of the victim.

"If I killed Bolitho some day, surely it would come under the head of justifiable homicide," was the nice little point of criminal law which for a few moments agitated Mr. Buddlecombe's magisterial mind. "Bolitho," he remarked, as soon as he had recovered himself a little, "you are utterly wrong, as you generally are, in your conjectures. The business between this gentleman and myself is of so private a nature as to necessitate a temporary separation even between two who have been 'boys together.' You will oblige me, Bolitho, by leaving us alone for a short time."

"Of course, Buddle, old boy, if you really wish it. Don't stand on ceremony with me. I don't with you;" this last

statement being fully illustrated by a slap on the back.

“ I know you don’t,” said Mr. Buddlecombe, sharply. “ I wish you did. But there’s as much chance of your standing on ceremony as there is of your standing on your head ; and that being the lightest part of your system will naturally always be at the top.”

At this personal sally old Bolitho laughed until the tears ran down his fat red cheeks.

“ Now what *are* you to do with a delicate little sensitive plant like that ?” groaned Mr. Buddlecombe. “ How can you guard your language so as not to offend this shrinking little *mimosa pudica* ?”

“ Quite right, Buddle, quite right,” said old Bolitho, wiping his eyes. “ I’m neither a master of ceremonies nor an acrobat, so

I neither stand on ceremony nor my head. Ha, ha, ha! But as you really wish it, I'll leave you and go and join the ladies. See you again, Warriner, my boy. One more shake of the hand. By Jove, I can't look at you, after what your brother-officers have told me, without picturing the whole thing. The shots fly like hail. Bang, bang! go the guns. 'Forward!' is the cry. Bang, bang! more guns——"

"Bolitho, I object to spirited imitations of big guns in my house. The only imitation of a gun you can oblige me with will be by going off;" and Mr. Buddlecombe pointed to the door.

"All right, Buddle," said old Bolitho. "Don't make a stranger of me. Bang! I'm off;" and off he was, gaily humming the "British Grenadiers" as he went.

His departure was a relief to Warriner, as well as to the Mayor; for now, having

fulfilled the condition on which Mrs. Buddlecombe's support had been promised, there was no longer that object in delay which had existed before the stipulated invitation to dinner had been wrung from the unwilling host. On the contrary, delays and interruptions were now as undesirable as, before dinner, they had been the reverse, inasmuch as they were calculated to work Mr. Buddlecombe's excitable temperament into a dangerously combustible condition, in which a fearful explosion might result on the coming disclosure.

"Now, sir," said Mr. Buddlecombe, as he resumed his seat on old Bolitho's departure, "now for this wonderful revelation of yours."

"Not wonderful, sir, in the least," replied Warriner, who thought it prudent to let the old gentleman calm down a little

after the recent interruption before going straight to the point. "I assure you, sir, it is, like many apparently abstruse matters, very simple when you know all about it."

"Well, sir, we are now secure from further interruption; let us 'know all about it.'"

The Mayor's tone and manner—for his last four words were pronounced in a snappish imitation of Warriner's—warned the latter that he had better go on at once, and he had just commenced, "You are blessed, sir, with——" when again was the door opened, and Spigot entered.

"I beg your worship's pardon; I thought your worship had joined the ladies," apologised the obsequious menial.

Now who ever knew a servant, least of all a butler, enter an occupied room by mistake that he did not, before retiring, perform some little service, just to show

the readiness with which he could adapt himself to unforeseen circumstances, and also his unflagging attention to the *minutiæ* of his office ? It is generally the fire that comes in for a little ostentatious attention. In this case, however, it being summer, there was no fire ; so Spigot, moth-like, made for the light, and, unconscious of the ferocious scowl fixed upon him, proceeded to regulate the moderator-lamp.

“Spigot, if you don’t retire this moment,” said Mr. Buddlecombe, fiercely, “you’ll find yourself taking the title-rôle of a one-act tragedy, entitled the *Butler on his Beam-ends ; or, the Intruder injured for Life*. Do you hear me ?”

“Certainly, your worship ;” and Spigot hurriedly shuffled out of the room, murmuring as soon as he got outside : “ Bless me, he goes off like a champagne cork !”

“Now, sir, once more, please,” said Mr.

Buddlecombe, not in the most angelic of tempers. "Not another interruption shall I brook. Out with this communication of yours, sir, which is to save me the large sum mentioned in your note."

With this he leaned forward in his chair, and anxiously awaited Warriner's reply.

"You have, sir, a charming and accomplished daughter——"

"Sir," said Mr. Buddlecombe, with frigid *hauteur*, "to the author of her being, who has had every opportunity of observing those charms and of paying for those accomplishments, your remark is totally devoid of novelty."

"To that daughter, sir," continued Warriner firmly, but politely, "I have heard, on the best authority, that you give a marriage portion of thirty thousand pounds. Is not that the case?"

Mr. Buddlecombe rose from his chair in fierce wrath.

“Yes, sir, I do! And what of that, sir? What if I do? What the deuce is it to *you*?”

“Why, sir,” returned Warriner coolly, but courteously, “I’ll take her with nothing, and be proud and delighted to do so. You will thus readily perceive how a saving of thirty thousand pounds will accrue to yourself. That, sir, is the——”

“Get out of my sight!” gasped Mr. Buddlecombe, who, for some moments, had been speechless with rage. “Go away, or I shall have a fit! I—I’ll give instant orders to have you tarred and feathered!”

As the worshipful gentleman uttered this fearful threat, he staggered to the mantelpiece, rang a furious peal on the

bell, and then sank back into an arm-chair, evincing every symptom of an approaching apoplectic fit. He had now all but lost the power of speech, and could only, as he wildly gesticulated with his arms and rolled his head from side to side, faintly articulate :

“Get out of my sight ! Go away !”

“For goodness’ sake calm yourself, sir,” said Warriner, who was greatly alarmed. But he might just as effectually have addressed that remark to the winds and the waves in the midst of a typhoon, and the very tones of his voice produced a perceptible exacerbation of the apoplectic symptoms. “I really did not expect quite such an effect as this,” he thought. “My presence seems to exasperate him beyond all bounds. I shall never forgive myself if the consequences are serious. I shall retire for the present by the shortest route.”

Carrying this decision at once into effect, Warriner stepped through the French window, which was partly open, and disappeared in the darkness outside. He had scarcely made good his retreat, when Mrs. Buddlecombe, Florence, and old Bolitho, followed by Spigot and a few other servants, rushed into the room in response to the loud peals of the bell which had sounded the alarm throughout the house.

“O darling papa, what is the matter?” cried Florence, rushing terror-stricken to her father, and taking one of his hands in both hers.

“Joshua, my own Joshua, speak to me!” screamed Mrs. Buddlecombe, as she seized his other hand, knelt by his side, and looked imploringly up into his face.

But Mr. Buddlecombe spoke not; he only rolled his eyes, and breathed stertorously.

“O Joshua, Joshua!” sobbed Mrs. Buddlecombe, “I’ve often told you how it would be some day. How I *have* begged and prayed of you to curb that excitable temperament of yours, especially after a meal! But you would never take my advice.”

Now,

“Sadder than owl-songs or the midnight blast;
Of all the horrid, hideous notes of woe
Uttered by friends, those prophets of the past,
Is that portentous phrase, ‘I told you so.’”

It is also just about the most exasperating remark that can be made to anyone troubled in mind or in body. It may, therefore, appear that Mrs. Buddlecome rubbed the sore when she should have brought the plaster, as honest old Gonzalo would have expressed it. However, rubbing the sore was just the very best thing the good lady could have done. There is not the slightest

doubt that, on the homœopathic principle of like curing like, it saved Mr. Buddlecombe from apoplexy. A rage all but produced the disease ; another rage averted it. He at once found his tongue, though at first it was with difficulty that he used it.

“ ‘ O woman ! in our hours of ease,’ ” he observed feebly, but with an ominous glare in his eye, “ ‘ Uncertain, coy, and hard to please ; When pain and anguish wring the brow,’ your invariable remark is, ‘ I told you so, but you wouldn’t take my advice.’ ”

With this last outrage on Sir Walter Scott, Mr. Buddlecombe was himself again. He jumped up from his chair, and with fearful volubility poured forth the pent-up torrents of his wrath :

“ O Georgina, it’s positively maddening ! It doesn’t matter whether you’ve caught a cold in the head, or dropped ten thousand

pounds in railway shares, or slipped upon a bit of orange-peel, or murdered your mother-in-law, or carried away a button, or tumbled off the top of the Monument, it's always the same with a woman, 'I told you so, but you wouldn't take my advice.' Did you tell me, Georgina, that I was going to be made a fool of by that young puppy? Did you apprise me of the fact that I was about to be turned inside out, upside down, backwards and forwards, round and round, by that one-armed, double-faced young jackanapes?"

"Why, what has he done?" chorused everybody.

"Done? Done *me!* Why, he's obtained a dinner from me under false pretences, and then made a fool of me, coupled with a gross insult towards a member of my family."

"I don't believe it; there's been some

misunderstanding," said Florence to herself. "O dear, where is he?"

"Here, close that window, Spigot, and draw the curtains," said Mr. Buddlecombe. "Come along, follow me, you servants; and if we find him in the grounds, I'll have him tarred and feathered and then set on fire in the water-butt down at the stables;" and Mr. Buddlecome bustled out of the room, followed by Spigot and the rest of the servants. -

"O, what *can* Algy have said or done, and what *has* become of him?" thought poor Florence, as she clasped her hands together.

"It will never do for Joshua to be left to his own devices in this excited state," said Mrs. Buddlecombe. "He doesn't know what he's saying. Tarred and feathered, and set on fire in the water-butt, indeed! I'll follow him;" and Mrs. Buddlecombe hurriedly left the room.



CHAPTER II.

A TRUSTY FRIEND.

LORENCE was about to follow her mother, when old Bolitho placed his hand gently on her shoulder and detained her.

“Stay, Florry; your father is all right now. He has regained his normal condition of fluster, and you had better leave him to your mother. It’s a queer piece of business, isn’t it? But I don’t believe for one moment young Warriner has done or said anything wrong.”

“Neither do I.”

“I wish he had not beaten such a rapid retreat, though. However, I won’t believe any harm of him. I never came across a young fellow I liked and admired so much in every way.”

“What a darling old pet old Mr. Bolitho is !” thought Florence.

“I tell you what it is,” said Mr. Bolitho, addressing an imaginary audience rather than Florence, “if I had a daughter I’d—I’d—hang it ! I’d ram her down his throat as a reward for valour !”

Notwithstanding her distress of mind, Florence found it impossible to repress a laugh ; but old Mr. Bolitho looked quite serious, a wonderful phenomenon that at once attracted her attention.

“What’s the matter, Mr. Bolitho ?”

“Well, since you’ve noticed a change in my manner, I’ll tell you what’s the matter. I must say, Florence, that during all these

years I have known you, ever since you were a baby with a mistaken notion that your duty towards your godfather was to gouge his eyes out, I do not recollect one single act of yours which was anything but pleasing in those organs, not even your infantile efforts to deprive me of them."

"Then I have incurred your displeasure this very evening? O, what is it, Mr. Bolitho?" asked Florence, eagerly. "Can I," she asked herself, turning her face away to hide the blushes with which the very thought suffused her fair cheeks, "O, can I unconsciously during the dinner have betrayed my love for Algy?"

"Yes, Florry, I am sorry to say that this very evening your conduct occasioned me some pain and, I may add, annoyance."

"Occasioned you pain and annoyance, Mr. Bolitho? *You*, who have always been

a second father to me? O, you know I would not do so willingly!"

"I do not like to see, Florry, in one so young such coldness, such marble-like indifference in a case where anyone would suppose youthful interest, and at all events a passing sympathy, would be most readily awakened. That gallant young fellow, Florry, with the tacit but eloquent reminder of his gallantry before you in the shape of that shattered arm — why, the sight of him stirs up even *my* old blood; but *you*, a young girl at an impressionable age too, were like an icicle—treated him, forsooth, with a frigid indifference that amounted to positive contempt. I could have shaken you, Florry!"

"O, how awfully knowing Mr. Bolitho is!" murmured Florence, as she turned aside to hide a smile.

"Ah, you may well turn away, Florry,

conscience-stricken in the knowledge that my rebuke is merited. And the worst of it is, I could see that this coldness was no overacted assumption of maidenly coyness, but genuine, if such a term can be so unworthily applied."

"O Mr. Bolitho, how can you see into our hearts in this way?" said Florence, archly.

"Ah, Florry, we old people can see through and through you young ones. Our mental vision can go through a whole line of young people like a straw through a row of larks. It's all here, Florry," tapping his forehead. "Age may dim our eyes, but experience provides us mentally with patent reflectors of the best description. Don't be cold-hearted, Florry. I have certainly never noticed anything of the sort in you before this evening; but this evening it was unmistakable."

“The very evening of all others when my heart was warmest,” thought Florence.

“Beware of coldness of heart, Florry, my child,” resumed Mr. Bolitho, evidently determined that if for once in his life he preached a sermon he would make the most of his text. “A cold-hearted girl will grow up into a calculating, uncharitable, intolerant, and intolerable woman of the world. Just think, Florry, when your little head rested on your little pillow, and you lay nestling upon your soft downy little bed, soothed to sleep by a delicious sense of security and the sweet consciousness of loving hearts around you, that young fellow lay far from ‘home, sweet home’” (Florry turned away, buried her face in her handkerchief, and gave way to tears), “his couch probably a few feet of mud in the deadly trenches; his lullaby the savage shouts of the enemy, the shrieks

of the wounded, or the rattle of musketry; his narcotic the agonies of a wound received for *you*, for *me*, for *every* Englishwoman and Englishman who lives at home at ease."

With a passionate vehemence Florence turned to Mr. Bolitho, placed her hands on his shoulders, and gazed steadfastly up into his face through her tears.

"O Mr. Bolitho, I love him!"

"Eh?" said old Bolitho, coming down with a run from eloquent declamation to gaping astonishment.

"I love him."

"Love him?"

"Yes, dearly, fondly, with all my heart!"

"Bless my soul! This is an astounding jump from the arctic circle to the torrid zone—from thirty degrees below zero to one hundred and twenty in the shade. Do you mean to tell me you love this young man?"

“Yes, passionately.”

“Dear me,” said Mr. Bolitho; adding in a soliloquy, as he turned away from Florence, “I had no idea I possessed this wonderful gift of eloquence to such a dangerous degree. I must use it with greater care, or give it an outlet in Parliament. Here have I, by sheer force and beauty of language, so worked upon this young girl’s feelings as to actually make her fall desperately in love with a young man whom, not five minutes before, she regarded with utter indifference. I must undo the mischief.”

Here old Bolitho faced about, coughed, and assumed a severe expression of countenance.

“Florence Beatrice Henrietta, as your godfather I feel my moral responsibility most acutely, and I totally disapprove of this sudden plunge of yours into the vortex

of love. At your age, Florence Beatrice, I should have taken at least three hours falling desperately in love, but you have done it in as many minutes; and now it is my bounden duty to see that you fall out as quickly as you fell in. Why, what do you mean by it? You never set eyes on this young man before this evening."

"O yes, I have," said Florence. "We have known and loved each other ever since we met at Folkestone, when mamma and I were there by ourselves, summer before last; and he had not long been sent home from the Crimea after the first time he was wounded."

"Then it wasn't my eloquence, after all," observed old Bolitho, rather thankfully. "Florry, you sly little puss, you've been quietly poking fun at your old friend and godfather."

"No, I never felt more in earnest in

my life than I do now. O Mr. Bolitho, you said that, while he was away in that awful land of bloodshed and pestilence, I slept through the nights in peaceful happiness. You said, too, something about my pillow. Ah, it could tell a sad little tale of 'patter, patter' all through the weary long nights for many, many months."

"Poor little pillow!" said old Bolitho, with emotion.

"The agony and suspense of that time, borne in secret, nearly wore me out," whimpered poor little Florence, wiping her eyes with her handkerchief.

"Yes, yes," said old Bolitho, patting her shoulder; "I recollect now how ill you looked, and how we physicked you for outgrowing your strength, or something of that sort."

"I suffered more than he did. O, Mr. Bolitho, there is more aching in the

loving hearts at home than in the wounds of those fighting abroad."

And here Florence, completely overcome by the recollections of what she had endured, threw herself, sobbing, on her old friend's bosom.

"Don't cry, Florry," said old Bolitho, in a very husky voice, and folding his arms round her; "don't cry. As the old song says,

"O, were I Queen of England,
Supreme 'neath heaven's dome,
I'd have no fighting-men abroad,
No weeping maids at home—
I'd have no fighting-men abroad,
No weeping——"

old jackasses over sixty years of age who ought to know better;" and up went old Bolitho's handkerchief to his eyes. "I never could stand seeing a woman cry, least of all my little goddaughter Florry,"

he continued, as he enveloped his fine erubescient old proboscis in the silken folds of the handkerchief. "The sight of a woman crying always gives me a severe cold in the head," this statement being followed by a corroborative blast on the afore-mentioned feature. "I suppose she creates a certain amount of dampness in the atmosphere. D-o-don't cry, Florry; you're giving me the influenza."

"It's over-excitement after all these months of suspense; and then the anxiety of to-night as to what has happened between papa and Algy. There, I shan't cry any more, Mr. Bolitho."

"Ah, Florry," said the soft-hearted old man, holding her at arm's length and gazing fondly on the sweet girlish young face, "how could he find it in his heart to leave you that time at Folkestone? for his brother-officers, who are never tired of

singing his praises, have told me that he insisted on returning to the Crimea long before he had sufficiently recovered from his first wound to be fit for campaigning."

"Ah, Mr. Bolitho, you do not know Algy as well as I do."

"Well, I don't suppose I do, my dear."

"It was because he was so brave and so good and so true that he left me. When I tried to persuade him not to go, and pointed out that surely he had fought and bled enough for his country, and, I am now ashamed to say, added that he couldn't care for me if he insisted on going before he was ordered, he silenced me with two lines of poetry, which, he said, had been addressed more than two hundred years ago by a cavalier to his lady-love when she had chided him for leaving her to go to the wars :

“ ‘ I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more.’

I never have forgotten them, and never shall ; they are so tender and true.”

“ Well, Florry, I am glad *you* have proved more ‘ tender and true ’ than the lady to whom those lines were originally addressed,” said old Bolitho, alluding, of course, to the story of the unfortunate young Lovelace, the warrior-poet in point.

“ Why, do you mean to say she proved unfaithful, with those beautiful lines always whispering to her heart as they *must* have done ?”

“ Yes,” said Mr. Bolitho, who was as hearty an admirer of the old English ballads as Sir Philip Sidney—“ yes ; when he returned from the wars wounded, as Algy has done, he found her married to another.”

“ O, how sad !” said Florence. “ Why,

it's even more shocking than the conduct of Annie Laurie in not marrying the man who paid her such beautiful compliments about her throat and breast, and was ready to lay him down and die for her sake."

"Well, well, Florry, it's all the same to him now whether she was faithful or not, so you needn't——"

"Hush, Mr. Bolitho! I think I hear tapping at the window. Yes, and I hear Algy's voice calling you."

Florence was quite right, and in what old Bolitho called "a brace of shakes" the shutters were opened, and Algernon Warriner admitted.

"See, the conquering hero comes once more," said old Bolitho. "Conquering hero, what the dickens made you bolt in that way?"

"O Algy, what happened between you

and papa ? and what made you go away so hurriedly ?”

“ Yes, yes, I’ll explain all ; but tell me first, Florry, how your father is.”

“ O, he’s all right. Mamma put him into another rage, which brought him round at once. Now, Algy, tell us all about it. You can say anything you like before Mr. Bolitho. I’ve made him our confidant.”

“ Yes, my dear boy, fire away.”

“ Well, Florry, I must first explain to you the little *ruse de guerre*, or rather *d’amour*——”

“ It’s all the same, my dear boy,” interposed old Bolitho. “ Ovid, who’s an authority on the subject, says, ‘ Love is a species of warfare.’ ”

“ Which I employed to obtain an invitation to dinner this evening from your father.”

“ You needn’t, Algy ; I know it.”

"Why, has he told you?"

"No; I was in the room behind the screen all the time you were with papa before dinner, and I heard everything. That was *my* little *ruse*."

"And why were you there, Florry?"

"To protect you, Algy."

"Dear me, I had no idea I had such an effective little guardian angel so near me."

"Well, but Mr. Bolitho doesn't know, Algy; so we must enlighten him. You see, Mr. Bolitho, mamma said she would never countenance our engagement until she saw Algy a guest at papa's table by papa's own invitation. Now, Algy, you go on; you can do it quicker."

"Well, you see, Mr. Bolitho, I knew if I could secure Mrs. Buddlecombe as an ally the battle would be half won——"

"You know, Mr. Bolitho, mamma's awfully fond of Algy."

“Besides it was necessary to make a beginning of some sort, and I knew that with Mr. Buddlecombe’s prejudices any ordinary course was out of the question. So I determined to get this invitation to dinner. I called this evening shortly before the dinner-time, and sent up a letter to Mr. Buddlecombe, stating on my word of honour, that it was in my power to save him a large sum of money if he would grant me an immediate and private interview. Eventually this had the desired effect. I was granted the interview, and I managed to spin it out without divulging the scheme, until, what between curiosity to hear what I had to say and anxiety not to have the dinner spoiled, he was forced to adopt the middle course of inviting me to dine. Well, after dinner——”

“Now comes the part I want to know,” interpolated Florence.

"I divulged my scheme, by which Mr. Buddlecombe was to be saved thirty thousand pounds."

"Thirty thousand pounds!" ejaculated old Bolitho. "Bless me, quite a fortune!"

"Yes; that, I believe, is the exact amount of your dowry, isn't it, Florry?"

"Yes; but what of that, Algy?"

"Why," said Warriner, placing his arm round Florence's waist, and drawing her tenderly to him, "I told him I would be proud and happy to take you with nothing. That was the scheme by which he was to be saved thirty thousand pounds. Quite correct, wasn't it? On this your father nearly had a fit, and would have had one, there's not the slightest doubt, if I had not got out of his sight as soon as possible. So I beat a rapid retreat, and waited outside, with a quiet cigar, on the look-out. Then I made a reconnaissance in the direction of this

window, and on hearing Mr. Bolitho's dulcet tones, I tapped ; and there I was, tapping with the pertinacity of a woodpecker, for about——"

"O good gracious, Algy, what's the matter with Mr. Bolitho?"

Well might Florence be startled by the appearance her good old friend and confidant presented. He looked even nearer apoplexy than Mr. Buddlecombe had gone. His face was purple, his cheeks inflated, the veins on his forehead knotted, and his eyes seemed starting from his head. It was fully two minutes—which is a long time when you are choking—before Mr. Bolitho, by dint of vigorous slapping on the back from Florence and Warriner, recovered sufficiently to speak.

"O dear, O dear!" wheezed and gasped the old gentleman, with a twinkle in his eye which presaged a possible relapse at

any moment. "You've nearly been the death of me, my boy. Two fine old English gentlemen killed in the same evening wouldn't have been a bad bag for even a Crimean hero. You see, Florry, I was afraid of laughing outright for fear of bringing your father in. O dear, O dear! I never knew any one get the blind side of my old friend Josh Buddle before! Tread on my toe, Florry; stamp upon it, jump upon it—the right toe, the gouty one. That may induce me to take for a few moments a more serious view of things in general."

It is highly probable that an acute twinge of gout *would* temporarily dull even the keenest sense of the ridiculous; but this drastic measure, as prescribed by Mr. Bolitho for himself, was not applied, and his mirth was allowed to subside gradually.

“Now we must talk a little business,” was his first remark on regaining a certain amount of composure. “I’ll make it all right with your father in the end, Florry. Just at first he’ll be a little obstreperous ; but constant dropping will wear away a stone, and I mean to drop on to him with a little plan I’ve got here,” and Mr. Bolitho tapped his forehead significantly.

“Patent reflectors, Mr. Bolitho ?” asked Florry, archly.

“Ah, you sly little puss ! No, I shan’t tell you what my little plan is, but I’m pretty sure it will do a great deal to make the course of true love run a little more smoothly ; and as there is nothing like striking when the iron is hot—precious hot it was too when we last saw it—I’ll go at him this very evening. But, War-riner, my boy, until matters are a little more advanced, you must not be seen here

by my old friend. It would exasperate him in his present frame of mind, and you must be off soon."

"Certainly. My only object in reappearing on the scene was to ascertain Mr. Buddlecombe's condition, and to assure Florry that I had not been guilty of anything very outrageous."

"O, we both knew you hadn't done anything wrong, Algy; didn't we, Mr. Bolitho?"

"Yes, yes, of course we acquitted you, my dear boy, without a trial. Now, I dare say I'm a little in the way, am I not?"

"O, you could never be in the way, Mr. Bolitho," said Florence, her heart brimming over with gratitude to the old fellow.

"Ah, that's just what your father always says, my dear. But what I mean is, you'd like to say a few little confiden-

tial words to each other before you part ; wouldn't you ? I'll just go outside and keep *cave*, as we used to say at school, for your father may be back again at any moment.'

A few words should here be said in defence of Mr. Bolitho, against whom the serious charge of aiding and abetting a child in deceiving a parent might be brought by the reader. In conniving however, at Florence's clandestine engagement with Algernon Warriner, the old gentleman was doing what he thought right, taking into consideration that Mr. Buddlecombe's fierce dogmatism, crotchets, and irritability—failings that seemed to increase every day—were not rendering the young girl's home as bright and happy as it should have been. Then, again, loving Florence as fondly as if she had been his own child, her happiness was the dearest

wish of his heart ; and this happiness he considered would rest on as secure a base as can be found upon earth, if she became the wife of Algernon Warriner.

“ Now, when I cry out ‘*Cave !*’ ” said Mr. Bolitho, retiring towards the door, “ you take your departure through that window, my dear boy, and smoke another cigar in the grounds ; and I’ll join you in about a quarter of an hour afterwards and report progress.”

“ Very well, all right,” said Warriner ; adding, as Mr. Bolitho took up his position in the hall on outpost duty, “ Isn’t he a first-rate old fellow, Florry ?”

“ O yes, he’s always so kind,” said Florence.

However, they had something else to talk of besides old Bolitho.

“ O Florry,” said Warriner, taking her hand in his, while the two gazed fondly at

each other, "how I have looked forward to this moment, when, face to face, I could tell you——"

"O Algy," murmured Florence, simultaneously, "how I have longed for an opportunity like this, when, safe from interruption, I could——"

"*Cave !*" said old Bolitho, rushing into the room, while in the distance Mr. Buddlecombe was heard approaching in high altercation with Mrs Buddlecombe. "The enemy is upon us. There are times when the British infantry must retreat, and this is one of them."

So saying, Mr. Bolitho unceremoniously shoved Warriner, together with his hat and coat, through the French window and closed it after him, just a couple of moments before Mr. Buddlecombe entered.



CHAPTER III.

THE ENEMY CAPITULATES.



HE dramatic situation at the close of the last chapter was decidedly strong. As the lover went out at the window, the enraged parent came in at the door.

“Not another word, Georgina!” said the irate Mr. Buddlecombe, continuing the running fight, which had been going on between himself and his wife, down the stairs and all along the passages on their way back to the library, “not another word! I mean to assert my authority.”

"And I mean to submit to it, Joshua, only up to that point where it continues to be lawful and just," returned Mrs. Buddlecombe, decisively. "I've told your father everything, Florry dear," she added, as Florence nestled up to her side.

"Florence," said Mr. Buddlecombe, in the tones of a judge about to pronounce sentence on a hardened malefactor.

"Yes, papa," faltered Florence, as she left her mother's side, and meekly stood with downcast eyes in front of her father.

"You had better go to your room at once and superintend the preparations for your departure. I have directed your maid to commence immediately packing up all that you will require for a prolonged stay from home."

"O papa!" said Florence, with a start and turning pale, as she heard her sentence of banishment pronounced.

“Yes, you go to your aunt Virginia’s in the North to-morrow morning at an early hour, escorted by me.”

- “And I say she shall *not* go,” said Mrs. Buddlecombe, advancing with a resolute air and placing her arm round Florence as if to shield her. “She is as much my child as yours, Joshua. She shall *not* go.”

With lowering brow, Mr. Buddlecombe was about to assert his supremacy, when old Bolitho, who up to this moment had been surreptitiously fastening the window and drawing the curtains after Algernon’s exit—covering his retreat, so to speak—came forward and threw himself into the van of the contest.

“And I, Buddlecombe, on the grounds of our having been boys together——”

“O, gracious!” burst forth Mr. Buddlecombe, clapping both hands to his ears and

spinning round on his heels, "that is at least the second time within my recollection that you have made that remark!"

"Well," said old Bolitho, warmly, "I'll take up another position, that of Florry's godfather, and in *that* capacity I object. And if that's not sufficient, I'm a Fellow of the Royal Humane Society, and in the name of that useful and noble body I protest against the cruelty of sending this delicate little flower to droop and fade away under the chilling influence of that detestable old iceberg you call 'Aunt Virginia.' I was once in her society for five minutes, and I had to drink three glasses of hot grog in rapid succession before I could get the chill out of my marrow."

"Well, upon my word!" said Mr. Budlecombe, folding his arms and surveying the three in front of him with a vain

attempt to be calmly contemptuous. "This is rich, deliciously rich! Three to one! And those three the wife of my bosom, the child of my heart, and the friend of my youth!"

This enumeration of the odds was too much for Florence.

"No, no, papa!" she exclaimed, rushing to his side and placing her hands on his arm. "We are not all against you. I'll be your own dutiful daughter. I'll go, papa; I'll obey you."

Mr. Buddlecombe was not prepared for this, and there is no doubt that, by thus unexpectedly hauling down her colours, Florence did infinitely more execution than if she had nailed them to the mast and fought desperately.

"Go back to your mother, Florence," said Mr. Buddlecombe severely, at the same time confessing to himself that this

was the first shot in the campaign that had hit him.

Old Bolitho noticed and determined to follow up the advantage.

“Leave him to me for a little; I know so well how to quiet him down,” he whispered, with many nods and winks to Florence and her mother. “Buddle,” he added aloud, at the same time advancing towards the friend of his boyhood, “I want to speak seriously to you.”

“The temptation, Bolitho, of hearing you speak seriously for once in your life is more than I can withstand,” was the not over-gracious rejoinder. “What is it?”

“Well,” said Mr. Bolitho, drawing his disputatious old acquaintance on one side and speaking very confidentially, “to begin with, Buddle, don’t split.”

Mr. Buddlecombe, whose temper was not particularly soothed at being dragged

along by the elbow as if he were being "run in," turned sharp round, and angrily confronted the utterer of the forcible but not elegant figure of speech.

"Bolitho, *Bo-litho*, do I look as if I were going to split?" he asked, as he placed a thumb in each arm-hole of his waistcoat and glared furiously. "I know what Bolitho means," he added, in a low growl as he turned on his heel; "but one has always to be on the defensive against his detestable familiarity."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Bolitho; "I say, Buddle, you'll be the death of me some day. Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've often thought exactly the same thing myself," said Mr. Buddlecombe, sadly; adding, with an air of resigned martyrdom, "This is Bolitho's idea of a serious conversation; begins with a horrible slang school-boy expression, and continues with

a guffaw that might awaken the Seven Sleepers."

"I mean, of course, Buddle, let what I'm going to say to you be between ourselves for the present. Now, you know, I'm an old bachelor——"

"Bolitho," interrupted Mr. Buddlecombe, with perhaps just a tinge of envy in his tones, "your lively disposition proclaims the fact more eloquently than words."

"An old bachelor with neither kith nor kin," went on Mr. Bolitho, too engrossed in his subject to heed the interruption. "Now you know, Buddle, what I'm worth as well as I do."

"Well, and what of that?"

"What of that? Why, if Florry marries as I wish, I'll leave her, with the exception of a few small legacies, every penny I've got. I pledge you my sacred word of honour to that. And the husband I've

got in my eye for her is young Warriner. There, put that in your pipe and smoke it."

Accompanying this emphatic and figurative injunction with a hearty slap on the back, old Bolitho left Mr. Buddlecombe to his meditations, which ran pretty much as follow :

"With all his faults, and they are legion—confound him, my back is tingling still!—Joe Bolitho is rich, and his word is his bond. I begin to realise, too, that a pretty, young, unmarried daughter is a very disturbing element in a household. Why, all this will play the very deuce with one's digestive organs. I could never go through another evening like this. I don't know what to do."

Here the poor gentleman's perplexities were gently interrupted by Mrs. Buddlecombe.

“Joshua,” said that lady, in a coaxing wheedling tone of voice, “anyone seeing us together lately would suppose that we were anything but the loving united couple we are in reality. Why is it, Joshua?”

“Why is it?” repeated Mr. Buddlecombe, fiercely. “Why, because of the confounded military. They’ve turned the whole of Puddleton upside down, as I said they would; and you’re standing on your head with the rest of the Puddleton population.”

“Well, Joshua,” returned Mrs. Buddlecombe, affectionately, “let us heal the breach in the same way it was made—by the military. Why shouldn’t we give Florry to this young Warriner? They have known and loved each other for some time, it appears. What more could we desire? He is clever, good-tempered,

brave, handsome, well-born, not badly off, and has expectations."

Thus driven in anticipation step by step from any worldly position he might have taken up, Mr. Buddlecombe assumed a moral one.

"Georgina, he took me in by a trick unworthy of a man of honour."

"That was to win me over to his side, Joshua."

"That makes it none the less a trick, Georgina."

"Ah, Joshua," said Mrs. Buddlecombe, placing her cheek against her husband's shoulder and looking archly up into his face, "do you recollect a certain young man, the soul of honour, who, to win the good opinion of a certain young lady's mother, descended to a trick—a very nasty trick, too—filling his pockets with——"

"Georgina, I did that for love of you,"

said Mr. Buddlecombe, hastily cutting short the disagreeable reminiscence of his courtship.

“ Well, Joshua, *this* trick—which I am bound to say is a much nicer one than the mutton-chop stratagem—was all for love of Florry. Ah, Joshua, Joshua, don’t you know the old saying, ‘ All’s fair in love and war ’?”

Thus, by means of the Socratic or catechetical method of argument, was Mr. Buddlecombe driven into a corner from which there was no escape.

In the meantime old Bolitho and Florry were standing at the window in close consultation.

“ It’s all going on beautifully, Florry,” said the former. “ I can see your father is wavering.”

“ How kind you are, Mr. Bolitho !” said Florence, gratefully. “ How can we ever repay you for all this kindness ?”

“Nonsense, nonsense,” said old Bolitho, who, like all really true-hearted people, disliked to hear his praises hymned. “I am doing it all for my own selfish gratification. There’s Algy, Florry.”

“Where?” was the eager inquiry, as Mr. Bolitho stealthily drew aside the window-curtain.

“Over there under those trees.”

“O yes, I see the end of his cigar!” said Florence, rapturously. “I had no idea the end of a cigar was such a lovely object at night.”

“Isn’t ‘it?’” said old Bolitho, quietly laughing in his sleeve. “Quite takes the shine out of the ‘little star,’ doesn’t it?”

“‘Twinkle, twinkle, bright cigar,
That tells us, Algy, where you are.’”

Here a pantomimic intimation from Mrs. Buddlecombe that she was getting the best

of the argument incited Mr. Bolitho to a more active participation in the contest.

"Nothing like taking the bull by the horns. I'll give him the *coup de grâce* at once," said the impetuous old gentleman, as he opened the window and dashed through it in quest of Algernon Warriner.

"The enemy's capitulated, my dear boy. Come in and shake your future father-in-law by the hand."

Throwing away his cigar, Algernon at once obeyed the summons; and in a few moments Mr. Buddlecombe, in a sort of dream, found himself once more confronted by the man, the sight of whom a short time before had meant apoplexy.

"Mr. Buddlecombe," said the young soldier, in a frank manly way, "I beg to offer you my sincerest apologies for the disturbance I created in your household this evening. My whole defence lies in

the old saying, 'All's fair in love and war.' "

Hardly realising what was transpiring, Mr. Buddlecombe—now a passive victim to force of circumstances—allowed his hand to be heartily shaken by the last speaker.

"Dear me, what an effective and affecting *tableau*!" said the irrepressible old Bolitho. "I feel inclined to do the heavy father and shower blessings all round. Hallo, here's this morning's London paper! I'll take refuge in that."

The hearty old gentleman had barely hidden the light of his fine rubicund countenance behind the paper—a proceeding which might be compared to an eclipse of the sun—when Spigot entered the room, with an air of mystery and so absorbed in the importance of his mission as not to notice Algernon Warriner's presence.

“Your worship,” he confidentially whispered into the civic ear, “the young gent from the barracks is prowling about the grounds with a cigar or a lighted lantern. We’re not sure which, but rather fancy it’s a lantern.”

“Spigot,” said Mr. Buddlecombe, eagerly seizing the opportunity of having some one to let out at.

“Your worship,” said Spigot, putting his head on one side, and listening with a pleasantly expectant expression, which said, as plainly as words, “His worship’s about to compliment me on my vigilance.”

“I’ve travelled about, one way and another, to a considerable extent during my life.”

“You have indeed, your worship—Ramsgate, Margate, season - ticket to London, and, I believe, a voyage to Boulong.”

"But I might go on travelling from this to doomsday without ever meeting such a blockhead as you are."

"Certainly not, your worship," stammered Spigot, shuffling off in great confusion, which was not allayed by first running into Algernon Warriner, and then being run into by old Bolitho, who seemed to have suddenly gone clean out of his mind.

"Hooray! hooray!" cheered Mr. Bolitho, as he strode excitedly about the room, furiously waving the newspaper he held in his hand.

"What's the matter?" asked Mr. Buddlecombe.

"Hooray!" was all the answer vouchsafed. "To think now that I should have been the first to see it!" continued Mr. Bolitho, going up to Algernon with a beaming countenance and outstretched

hand. "Conquering hero, I must really shake your hand once more. No, I mustn't. I should hurt you. I shouldn't be able to moderate my congratulatory transports. I'll kiss Florry instead, and she'll pass it on at her earliest convenience."

Here a report like the crack of a huntsman's whip intimated, if nothing else did, that the old gentleman had suited the action to the word.

"Yes; but what is it all about, Mr. Bolitho?" asked Florence.

"Why, listen."

And here Mr. Bolitho read the following paragraph from the newspaper: "Her Majesty the Queen has been graciously pleased to confer the recently instituted distinction of the Victoria Cross upon Captain Algernon Fitzmaurice Warriner, of the Queen's Own Fusiliers, for con-

spicuous gallantry before the enemy in the recent Crimean campaign."

"O Algy, how proud I am of you!" exclaimed Florence, with glistening eye and mantling cheek.

"Ah, 'None but the brave deserve the fair,'" said old Bolitho. "To think now of my being the first to tell you, Warriner, my boy."

"I knew it many days ago, Mr. Bolitho," said Algernon, quietly.

"Knew it many days ago! Bless me, how coolly he takes it! Why didn't you tell us, then?"

"Because I had something else to think of," was the reply, accompanied by a significant glance at Florence.

"Well, I can't take it so coolly, though I didn't win it, hang me if I can! Buddle, you should be proud of your future son-in-law!"

And here, in a paroxysm of excitement, Mr. Bolitho actually clapped the newspaper over the head of Puddleton's worshipful Mayor.

For a few moments manslaughter lowered from every lineament of Mr. Buddlecombe's countenance, as it protruded through a rent in the advertisement-sheet, but the knowledge of his friend's irrepressibility soon led him to the homely conclusion that what cannot be cured must be endured.

"I should have been," observed Mr. Buddlecombe, so resigned to his fate that he did not attempt to remove the paper, which adorned his neck something after the fashion of an Elizabethan ruffle, "I should have been a much greater man than even Mayor of Puddleton, if it had not been for Bolitho. I feel that the best energies of my life have been wasted in one long futile effort to shut him up. It

is useless to struggle against the inevitable. Let me try and submit with apparent cheerfulness to my sentence of perpetual Bolitho for life. Let *me* remark, by way of a change, Bolitho, that we were boys together."



CHAPTER IV.

L'HOMME PROPOSE.



HE London season of 1856, a little later than usual, owing to a general tarrying to witness the entry of the victorious Guards into London, was at its height, and, amongst other important particulars connected with it, Lady Cecilia Warriner, widow of the late Colonel Warriner of the Grenadier Guards, sat on a certain evening at her toilet-table, undergoing the beautifying manipulation of her tire-woman. In plain language,

Lady Cecilia was having her hair dressed. Regarding the particular style of *coiffure* at that period my mind is steeped in an ignorance which is venial ; for, as Addison remarked, "there is not so variable a thing in Nature as a lady's headdress ;" and to be posted in the variations of so shifting a fashion is too much to expect from any chronicler except a Boswell or a Pepys. On the toilet-table, beside the glass, lay a letter as yet unopened, it having come to hand at a critical stage of the maid's operations, to wit, the concealment of a few "silver threads amongst the gold." The tell-tales, being at last arranged out of sight, were sufficiently out of mind to allow a cursory consideration of comparative trifles.

"A letter from Algernon," murmured her ladyship, as she glanced at the post-mark. "Poor dear boy, what a dreadful

place to be quartered in! Puddleton! The very name communicates a shudder to one's frame. I am dreadfully anxious to hear how he is getting on amongst the barbarians."

Notwithstanding this "dreadful anxiety," however, the "poor dear boy's" letter lay intact until the finishing touch had been given to Lady Cecilia's toilette, and then, as her fan and gloves were laid before her, she felt sufficiently at liberty to open the envelope.

Now all this does not mean that Lady Cecilia Warriner cared little for her son. It only means she cared rather less for him than for the pomps and vanities of this world, and she might easily have done that and yet cared a great deal, which in truth she did. Furthermore, it must be added, in justice to her, that she had seen him since his return from the Crimea, he

having proceeded to town on three days' leave for the express purpose of seeing his mother very soon after the triumphal entry of his regiment into Puddleton. Moreover, if ever vanity was excusable in a woman—and what woman has ever lived free from it?—Lady Cecilia had ample excuse for being vain. She seemed to possess the perennial beauty of Ninon de l'Enclos. Now, in the forty-third year of her age, and twenty-fifth of her reign, for she was still a reigning beauty, her loveliness, though of a different order, commanded as much admiration as in girlhood. London seasons, more than the lapse of Nature's seasons, had paled her cheeks. But what of that? The lily is as lovely as the rose. A few gray hairs now mingled with the auburn, but was not Froisette, the French maid, equal to that emergency? And even if she were not so

at all times, is not silver more chaste than gold ?

Having said thus much of Lady Cecilia Warriner, the reader will readily understand that she still commanded a host of admirers at her feet. The senior on the list was old Sir Tripton Madingley, who had worshipped at her shrine for rather more than a quarter of a century. To be sure, he had paid court to lesser goddesses, and even married one ; but Lady Cecilia had always occupied the highest niche in his temple of beauty.

Having perused her son's letter, gathered up her fan and gloves, and given one last approving glance at the mirror, this favoured daughter of Eve departed on her evening round of gaiety. Of course she was not going to waste all her magnificence on one entertainment. She dined at Carlton House Terrace, listened to some

music in Park Lane, and finally put in an appearance at a ball in Belgrave Square. It was at this last scene that she encountered her old friend and admirer Sir Tripton Madingley. The old beau had been a lady's man, a trifler, all his days. Had he been antedated to the middle ages, his equipment for life's campaign would have been mainly comprised in a pouncet-box, a guitar, and a ladder of ropes. The number of women to whom he had individually addressed the assurance, "You are the only one I ever truly loved," would have defied his own powers of computation, even with the aid of the most perfect system of mnemonics yet devised.

There was, however, one to whom this remark had been uttered with truth ; and that singular person was Lady Cecilia. And when she had refused him for the

sake of Charlie Warriner, then the reputed handsomest man in the Household Brigade, the discarded lover—as discarded lovers often do—had gone straightway and madly married some one else. There had been, however, this much of method in his madness, that the lady to whom he had offered his hand, if not his heart with it, had been, like the illfated heiress in the late gifted Mr. Robson's tragic lay, the only child of a rich merchant, “with a very large fortune in silver and gold.” As may be supposed, Sir Tripton had not found the chain of matrimony particularly galling. He went his own line, and, as it was one which she could hardly follow, she took hers, and so matters went on smoothly enough. Indeed they quarrelled far less than the most united couples generally do. In fact, they did not quarrel at all, for

"Theirs was the best of unions, past all doubt,
Which never meets, and therefore can't fall out."

Within a few years of the marriage—not a particularly happy one for the lady—the wealthy heiress had died, leaving her husband, as the expression goes, a pledge of their mutual affection. The blow, as may be imagined, had not been a particularly heavy one, and Sir Tripton had kissed the rod with almost as light a heart as he would have kissed a pretty girl. The pledge was now, at the period of this narrative—the *major* narrative, not this *minor* one—a young lady just introduced, and one of the largest prizes in the female matrimonial market. In her case there would be no tedious waiting for dead men's shoes. Her maternal and mercantile relatives had, in a very businesslike manner, protected the bulk of her mother's fortune from Sir Tripton's somewhat squandering hands;

and, at twenty-one years of age, Agatha Madingley—such was her name—would become sole mistress of a vast accumulation.

Lady Cecilia had not long graced the ball with her dignified presence, when she was joined by Sir Tripton as she sat apart from the throng of dancers.

“How well Agatha is looking to-night!” she remarked, after a while, as a tall graceful girl passed at a little distance on the arm of her late partner in the dance.

“Yes, she is improving, decidedly improving,” said Sir Tripton.

“Algernon is coming up to-morrow for a few days,” continued Lady Cecilia, with a certain significance.

“Ah, indeed!” was the response, in tones which betokened that this was by no means the first time the speakers had

conversationally coupled the two young people together.

"Yes, I heard from him this evening, just before I left home."

"Comes up to-morrow, eh?" repeated Sir Tripton, meditatively. "Then our little plot thickens with the appearance of the hero on the scene."

"Yes; at all events it must be thick enough for the two principal actors not to see through it at first. For if there is a circumstance calculated to breed mutual detestation in the minds of two young people, it is the knowledge that their respective parents have destined them for each other."

"Undoubtedly so," acquiesced Sir Tripton. "Now I mean to kindle the first spark of love for Algy in Agatha's bosom directly we get home. I shall lead her by the hand into the library, and, in a

voice trembling with suppressed emotion, I shall ask her if she is particularly anxious to bring her father's grey hairs in sorrow to the grave—not that I've got any," hurriedly interpolated the old beau, as he gracefully ran his fingers through his dyed locks. "Mere figure of speech. Now I think I may safely predict that Agatha's reply will be in the negative. 'Then beware of young Algernon War-riner,' I shall say. 'Fall in love with any male of the human species but that particular young man, and receive a father's blessing. But fall in love with that particular young man, and know the bitterness of a father's curse.'"

"But is not that carrying the doctrine of contrariety a little too far?" asked Lady Cecilia, with a languid smile.

"Not in the least. Was it not the forbidden fruit that was most longed for?

She'll go to bed, dream of him all night, and wake up desperately in love with him in the morning. And if you, my dear Lady Cecilia, will only pursue a similar course with Algy regarding Agatha, the two will be ready to rush into each other's arms at the very first opportunity, with mutual protestations of undying love on their lips."

"But are you quite sure Agatha may not be secretly contemplating matrimony on her own account?" said Lady Cecilia. "Girls, you know, especially those without mothers, sometimes arrive at such conclusions independently of paternal assistance."

"O dear, no! Besides, even if she has, directly I tell her that she is quite at liberty to marry anyone *but* Algy, she won't care two pins for anyone else. These young foolish things all know and

believe in the hackneyed saying that true love never runs smooth ; and conversely they imagine that no love which *does* run smooth can be true, or, what is more taking to their ideas, romantic. And if it is not for the sake of money or romance, it is, in a large majority of cases, for some trifling reason that girls marry. If you could get half a dozen young married women into the Palace of Truth, and ask them one after the other why they had entered into the holy bonds of wedlock, you would get these answers, or something like them—No. 1 : ‘I married because papa was so ridiculous as to object to my dancing five times in the evening with the same man, and I thought if I married I’d be able to do as I pleased in such matters.’ No. 2 : ‘I married because Georgie Smith got engaged, and I was *determined* she shouldn’t be married before me.’ No. 3 :

‘I married because widows’ caps are so sweetly becoming, and I wanted to take the first step towards qualifying for one.’

No. 4 : ‘I married because I was afraid people would think I had never been asked.’ No. 5 : ‘I married because I loved——’”

“Ah, there you have the good old-fashioned reason at last ; it is quite refreshing,” said Lady Cecilia, who had been leaning back in her chair, looking at her ancient adorer over the top of her fan, and lazily condescending to be amused by his volatile prattle, as she had been on occasions of this kind for the last quarter of a century.

“Don’t be in such a hurry, my dear Lady Cecilia. The fair confessor was going to say ‘another.’ In other words, married out of spite. But seriously, and to return to our former subject, are

you sure Master Algy has not already chosen for himself? I've answered for my child; can you answer for yours?"

"O, quite. Algernon is not one of those young men who find a dart in every pretty face. When he once gives his love I feel certain it will be given for ever and aye, and people capable of giving such love as this are very chary of bestowing it. Besides, what opportunity has he had of losing his heart, even if it were of the most susceptible nature, which I am sure it is not? He went straight from school to his regiment; and for the two years between joining and going out to the Crimea he was, when not engaged with his professional duties, too much engrossed in field-sports for falling in love. He is not likely to have seen any especially fascinating young damsel in the Crimea, I should think; and to imagine that at

Puddleton, where he has been since his return, there can be any girl for whom a son of mine could care, is too preposterous."

"Of course it is," acquiesced the old dandy. "We may safely dismiss from our minds all fear of danger from Buddledon, or whatever the name of the place is. And now having satisfactorily disposed of all obstacles, we may look on the matter as an accomplished fact. Ah, Lady Cecilia, 'marriages are made in heaven.' And 'heaven is here, where Juliet is.'"

Here our Romeo, who had "just enough of learning to misquote," shot a furious "œiliad" at the fortress which had withstood his twenty-five years' siege.

"Well," said Lady Cecilia, calmly ignoring the tender glance, "Algernon will arrive in the middle of the day. You

and Agatha had better come and lunch with us."

The invitation was accepted ; and Lady Cecilia, being tired, anachronistically wished her hostess "good-night" at three o'clock in the morning, and was escorted to her carriage by Sir Tripton.

"Good-night, my dear Lady Cecilia," he tenderly murmured, as he pressed her hand through the open window of the brougham.

"You should say 'good-morning,'" was the reply. "It is broad day."

"No ; not when you are going away," said the old beau, looking unutterable things. "'Your absence makes the night, your presence brings the day.'" Consequently Night, black-browed Night, now frowns upon me as your horses, like the steeds of Phaeton, are about to bear away the bright luminary which will not again

gild my path of life until—I turn up at lunch to-morrow.”

This anti-climax was caused by the steeds of Phaeton making a sudden snatch forward at their collars in their anxiety to get home, and carrying off the bright luminary of Sir Tripton's existence, and very nearly his toes as well. Without the slightest hesitation, however, Sir Tripton declined the Juggernaut performance of crushing himself or any portion of himself beneath his idol, and, nimbly skipping backwards, stood fondly watching the hind wheels until they turned a corner.

As Sir Tripton's dyed locks pressed his pillow a couple of hours later, the coming event, as he regarded his daughter's betrothal to Algernon Warriner, produced in him a frame of mind which may best be described as jubilant.

Now why all this self-congratulation? For really the disposal of a good-looking young heiress to a young gentleman of moderate means and expectations is not a thing of such difficulty as to render its accomplishment a matter of rejoicing on the part of the young lady's father, whatever the feelings of the young gentleman's parents may be. The answer lies rather deeper than we have yet penetrated into Sir Tripton's nature. His constant regard for Lady Cecilia was about the most reputable element of his composition, inasmuch as it had been the least variable. In the youthful heyday of his career as a man of fashion, Lady Cecilia was the only woman he had ever seen with whom he felt he could settle down as a respectable member of society; and now in his frivolous old age, when frivolity was indulged in only because it was second

nature, and not for the pleasure it gave, there was still the same conviction that Lady Cecilia was the only one for whom he could feel that love which would sweeten a more serious and consequently a better mode of life. Or shall we put it in another way, and say, gild the bitter pill of that old age which could not be staved off, however much it might be disguised, by dentists, perruquiers, tailors, and vendors of hair-dye?

That the cold statuesque beauty and manner of Lady Cecilia should have enthralled so lastingly a sunny volatile temperament like Sir Tripton's, is a psychological anomaly of constant recurrence in life. The assertion by one of the greatest of our old poets, that woman loves herself in man, may or may not be true; but, on the other hand, there is little doubt that man generally loves his opposite in

woman. Even physically this is the case. A very big man generally marries a very little woman; and your human tomtit evidently considers his destiny is matrimony with an ostrich of a woman. Though ever ready to meet the ardent ones half way, the glowing Sir Tripton, in his heart of hearts, evidently thought with Byron, that :

“ Your cold women are beyond all price
When once you’ve broken their confounded ice.”



CHAPTER V.

A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION.



HE meeting between mother and son was affectionate, and Lady Cecilia was unusually demonstrative over it. Her heart, though desperately full of worldliness, was still a mother's heart, and as such it could not but swell with pure loving pride as she surveyed her handsome and gallant young son. There is no such health-restorer as happiness, and for the last few days Algernon Warriner had lived in an Elysium. His face, when Lady Cecilia

had last seen it, had been wan and drawn with months of suffering, but now the glow of health was once more on his cheek.

"If Agatha doesn't lose her heart to him, she hasn't got one," she thought. "You will meet some old friends at luncheon, Algernon," she added aloud, with considerably more meaning in her words than met the ear addressed.

"Old friends?" said Algernon, gaily; "delighted to hear it. I believe in 'auld lang syne.' Who are they?"

"Sir Tripton Madingley and his daughter. This is her first season."

"Sir Tripton, eh?" said Algernon, laughing, for the old beau had always been a joke with him. "And what's the daughter grown like? I haven't seen her since she was a little girl in frocks. I should think *chaperon* to a marriageable young lady was

not exactly old Sir Tripton's most congenial rôle."

"Agatha is a very nice girl; seems to be admired; but she's hardly my style of beauty, and hardly yours, I should think," replied Lady Cecilia, carelessly; for well did she know that this was one of those cases in which "faint praise" does not "damn." It is much better to expect little and be agreeably surprised, than to expect much and be disappointed. "At all events," continued Lady Cecilia, "it will be quite refreshing to you to meet people in society again; for of course, Algernon, you have no acquaintances amongst the people of Puddleton?"

"Haven't I, though!" said Algernon, warmly. "Amongst others, there's as fine a specimen of a hearty old English gentleman as I ever met with—a jolly old boy of the name of Bolitho."

“Never heard of him,” said Lady Cecilia, as if her words were equivalent to a sentence of social ostracism. “But now that I *do* hear of him, his name gives one the idea that he’s always dancing a hornpipe.”

“Well, he’s jolly enough, I can assure you, without that perpetual motion.”

“Very likely. Jollity is by no means an unusual concomitant of vulgarity,” said Lady Cecilia, superciliously.

“But he is not vulgar,” retorted Algernon, with warmth.

“So be it, Algernon. Heated arguments over trifles are. He is not vulgar.”

“No; unless goodness of heart, unbounded generosity, love of his fellow-creatures and of his country are vulgar; and then is he the vulgarest creature that ever walked the earth.”

“Well, I have heard of love at first sight, Algernon, and I am not prepared to

say that there is no such a thing; but friendship, I should have imagined, was a sentiment of a somewhat slower growth. If, however, there was a spot in England unfavourable to the rapid development of this mushroomlike friendship in the breast of a son of mine, I should have thought that spot was Puddleton. Friendship, especially sudden friendship, between two people is generally born of a congeniality in tastes and pursuits; and that you should find a kindred spirit in Puddleton is to me a surprise, and I admit not a pleasant one. Pray, have you any more Puddleton friends besides Mr. Bolero?" concluded Lady Cecilia, who had a contemptuous way of not being troubled to call people out of her own set by their right names.

"Yes, I have—the Mayor of Puddleton and his family."

"Dear me, Algernon! The Mayor of

Puddleton and his family ! Well, I confess that does not raise the same lively picture to my mind's eye as the name of your friend Mr. Bopeepo did."

" Well then, my dear mother, I'll draw the family picture for you."

" If you consider it necessary to do so, Algernon, or it will afford you the least pleasure, I shall submit to the delineation with at all events the consolation that I am acquiring knowledge on a subject of which I have hitherto been singularly ignorant ; for I confess," continued Lady Cecilia, who in her girlhood had been a Maid of Honour, " that in my mind a mayor and his family are nothing more than mere abstract ideas. A mayor is something with an instrument of torture called an address which he uses unsparingly ; a mayor's wife is something very much overdressed, who stands by awkwardly

bowing ; a mayor's daughter is something frightened out of its wits that presents a bouquet ; and a mayor's son—well, I don't think he has ever obtruded himself on my mind, even in the abstract ; but I suppose that he is something that does something with a ledger somewhere."

" You will shortly know a little more of the *genus*," said Algernon ; " for I may as well tell you at once that it is mainly on a subject very closely connected with the Mayor of Puddleton and myself that I have come up to talk to you about."

" O, I know," said Lady Cecilia, languidly. " But, my dear Algernon, it is high time you should give up these boyish pranks."

" I really don't understand you, my dear mother."

" Why, I recollect now that the mayor of a town is also its chief magistrate ; and

you have got into some scrape with him—pulled his door-knocker off, or put out all the lamps in the main street; something of that sort—and you’ve promised fifty pounds to some local charity as compensation, and you have not any spare cash at your agent’s. Am I not right? Of course, I must be. For what other subject could possibly bring you and the Mayor of Puddleton into close intercourse?”

“But there *is* another subject—a tender subject, a sacred subject, a subject dearer to me than life,” replied Algernon Warriner, with an earnestness that for a few moments startled his mother out of her usual repose.

“Algernon, what do you mean?” she asked, leaning forward and gazing with almost breathless interest into his face.

“I mean,” said Algernon, with soldier-like brevity, as he came to the point rather

quicker than when opening up the same subject in his memorable ante-prandia interview with Mr. Buddlecombe, "I mean that I love his daughter."

The announcement was as disagreeable as it was unexpected. Anger, disappointment, and all the bitterness of shattered hopes filled Lady Cecilia's breast; but she was not the one to "unpack her heart with words." Silently she leaned back in her chair, and an expression of disgust, as if some noisome reptile had crossed her path, came into her face.

"Yes, mother," said Algernon Warriner, keenly feeling the silent and bitter contempt more on account of the girl he loved than on his own. "Yes, one of those things who, half frightened out of their wits, present bouquets, has, to my great happiness and honour, promised to be my wife."

“I see how the case stands, though I should have thought you had had more strength of mind,” said Lady Cecilia. “You have not, you *cannot* have been a free agent in this contemptible piece of folly. You have been wheedled, flattered, coaxed, entrapped into it by this wily old Mayor; for in such cases it is the designing parent more than the comparatively innocent decoy who lands the weak victim.”

In the midst of his chagrin Algy Warriner could not repress a smile at the idea of Mr. Buddlecombe’s wiles and blandishments. He felt it expedient to dispel the illusion.

“At the first interview I ever had with my wily entrapper he wheedled me by keeping me waiting on his doorstep for about twenty minutes; his fulsome flattery took the form of calling me an impostor;

and he coaxed me to the extent of threatening to have me tarred and feathered for daring to propose to his daughter."

"Are these phrases mere figures of speech?" asked Lady Cecilia, in cold hard tones; "or do they convey matters of fact?"

"They are simple and unvarnished truths."

"Algernon, I blush for you."

Neither was this remark a mere figure of speech. Lady Cecilia's usually pale face was covered from neck to brow with an angry flush.

"Come, mother," said Algernon, "my mind is made up; the thing is as good as done; what's the use of crying over spilt milk?"

"But I do not call it *spilt* milk," said Lady Cecilia, so carried away for the moment as to adopt her son's homely

metaphor. "It is milk deliberately, madly, wantonly poured into the gutter."

Never in his life had Algernon Warriner seen his mother betray such symptoms of anger. He was the last man in the world to prolong, if he could help it, the pain of a wounded spirit, least of all his own mother's; and, though there was an angry flush on his face, he spoke the soft word which he hoped would turn away her wrath.

"I mentioned how my suit had been received not to cause you anger or pain, but to show you how thoroughly in earnest I have been in my love; for I can assure you, my dear mother, I relish insult as little as you do. Come, mother," he added, placing his hand on her shoulder with a gentle tenderness, "it was to tell you of this in all filial duty and affection that I came up to town."

With icy deliberation she put his hand away.

“Algernon,” she said, rising from her seat, and planting her right foot on the floor with a quicker motion than usually characterised her gestures—Lady Cecilia was incapable of stamping—“Algernon, you shall never marry this girl.”

“Never, mother?”

“Never, with *my* consent.”

“Then, mother, I must marry her without.”

Lady Cecilia inclined her head with cold stateliness.

“Then we need say nothing more to each other on the subject,” she remarked.

END OF VOL. I.

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